ELECTRONIC SOUND

THE ELECTRONIC MUSIC MAGAZINE

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101 RECORDS OF 1981

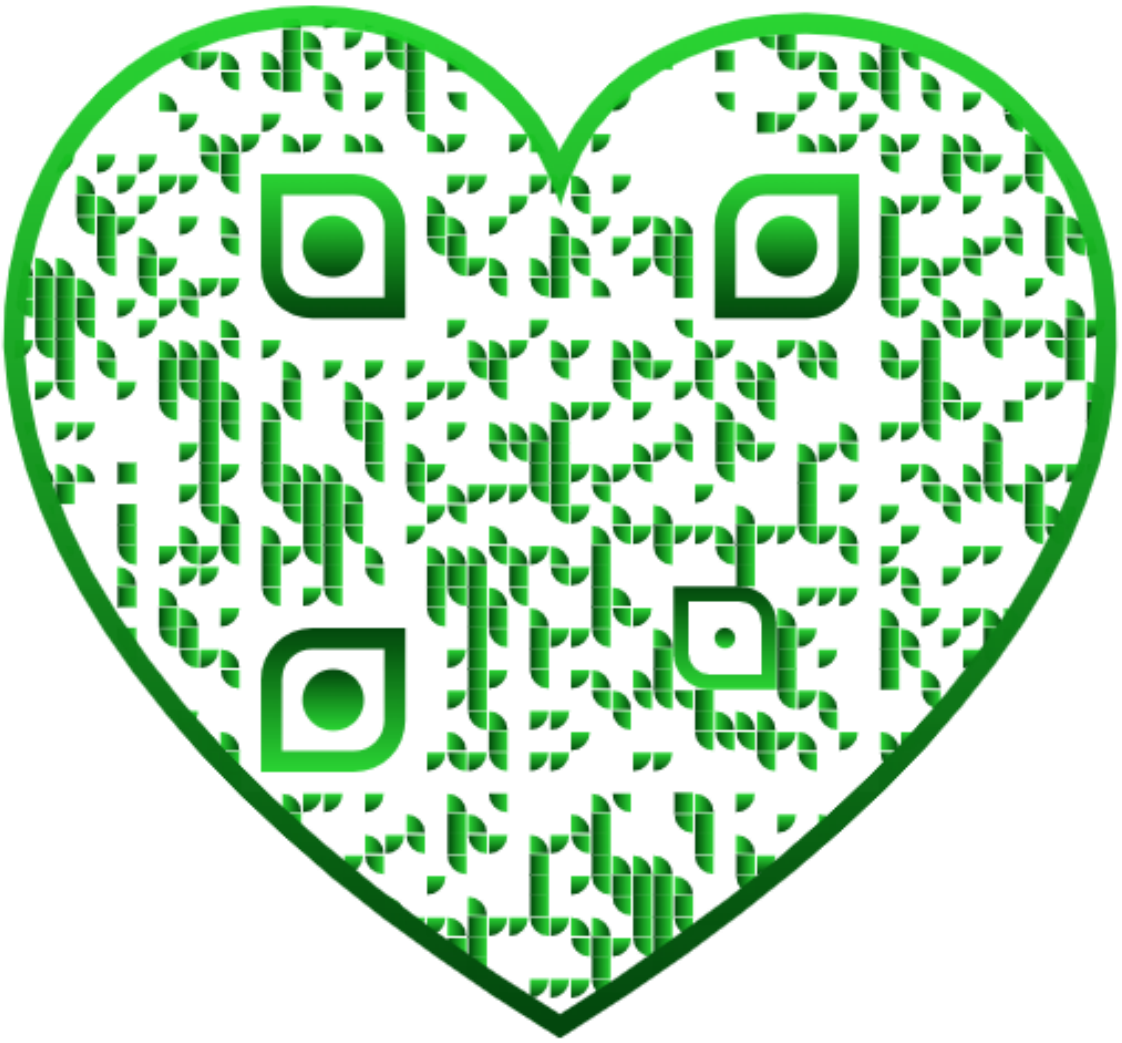
SYNTHPOP VS POST-PUNK

HALL OF FAME

VIS BAU PIL ACR FXX GMF HUM
FRZ DEP FLL WOB HI7 ANX GOF
CBI DVA XMD ECH WH? BWW 100
VOX LNX NEW BLT NUM CAB OMD
ENO YMO TBP DAF DVO EIN FAD

ELECTRIBE 101 / I MONSTER / DOROTHY MOSKOWITZ / MAN PARRISH / DUALIST INQUIRY / SAVAGE PENCIL

GAME CHANGER



112 WELCOME TO ELECTRONIC SOUND

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As you've probably worked out from the big numbers on the cover, we are rewinding back to 1981 for this month's lead feature. We've been working on it for a while, ever since we first got wind of 'Moving Away From The Pulsebeat: Post-Punk Britain 1977-1981', a five-CD boxset on Cherry Red. It came out at the end of March, so you'll find it in the shops now. It's jam-packed with gems and the choice of tracks – 105 of them in total – sparked a lot of discussion in the Electronic Sound office. Especially the selections for 1981, the end point for the collection.

Two years after Margaret Thatcher became prime minister and four years out from the heyday of punk, 1981 was a year of tremendous tension in the UK – politically, socially and culturally. Many of the country's inner cities experienced large-scale rioting in April and July, with pitched battles between angry youths and the police on the streets of London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds and elsewhere. Still, who cared about things like high unemployment, poor housing and systemic racism? Not when there was the pomp and glitz of Charles and Diana's wedding to enjoy on the telly.

When it came to music, one of the talking points of 1981 was the ever-increasing number of synthpop bands breaking into the UK mainstream charts, many of them climbing to the dizzying heights of the Top 10. At the same time, though, there was a dramatic surge in new independent talent, with the post-punk underground splintering into countless sub-genres – darkwave, alt-funk, punk-funk, industrial, goth rock, electro-dub, jangly pop, agit-pop, avant-jazz, mutant disco and so many more – and artists putting out their records on both established indies and previously unknown labels.

It all added up to an epic year for electronic, groovy, experimental and just plain brilliant music – whichever tribe you belonged to – and we're telling the story of 1981 through 101 milestone releases, both singles and albums (and a couple of tapes). We think we've done a pretty good job but, as is the nature of these beasts, we'll no doubt have neglected to include one or two of your favourites. At which point, we'd like to apologise to long-time ES reader Al Hine of Kirkwall for leaving The Flying Lizards' 'Fourth Wall' album off the final list, although we hope he'll be pleased to see Vivien Goldman in there. Talk to you on the socials soon, Al.

We have some fantastic interviews elsewhere in the issue too, including Electribe 101 singer Billie Ray Martin, I Monster men Dean Honer and Jarrod Gosling, and avant-garde pioneer Dorothy Moskowitz. Man Parrish gives us the inside skinny on 'Hip Hop, Be Bop (Don't Stop)', Saint Etienne's Bob Stanley mulls over his influences, and cartoonist Savage Pencil walks us through his cover art for The Fall's 'Lie Dream Of A Casino Soul'. Which, by the way, is the first track on 'Avant 81', the seven-inch EP we're bundling with the magazine this month. You've got your copy of that, right? Turn to page 6 if you haven't!

Electronically yours,
Push and Mark

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NEVER RECORDS

Ted Riederer

NEW ORLEANS, 2012

PICTURE: RYAN HODGSON-RIGBY
INTERVIEW: ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH

"I started Never Records back in 2010," says New York artist Ted Riederer (pictured sitting) of his community art installation. "The idea was very simple – I travel to a city, open a vinyl record shop and recording studio, so that anyone can come, perform and leave with a freshly cut vinyl record and digital file of their own music.

"First, I needed to buy a lathe. I was going to get a portable lathe called the Presto 6N originally – it's the same one used by Alan Lomax. But I was worried about durability, so I thought I'd get a new one, even though there aren't many manufacturers still operating. Using lathetrolls.net – a great message board where you can find pretty much anything – I discovered these guys called Vinyl Recorder, who are based in southern Germany.

"They're these engineers who, after the Berlin Wall fell, relocated two hours south of Munich and started a side hustle maintaining all the vinyl jukeboxes in the region. They would get requests from various bar owners for the same records, and being the ingenious people they are, decided that instead of buying the same records over and over again for each jukebox, they would just make them.

"They built this lathe that fits over a Technics 1200 – one of the greatest appliances made in my lifetime – which functions as the motor, and you can demo the cut with the stylus of the turntable itself.

"The price was right, but they wouldn't sell it to me over the internet, so I had to go in person. It's not that they wanted to meet me – they just didn't want me to bother them with tons of questions later!

"Since the first Never Records installation in 2011, when I took it to Liverpool, I've gone all around the world with it – across the States, Europe and to Amman, the capital of Jordan. It's insane really because the whole thing weighs about 400 kilograms! In New Orleans, where this shot was taken, I did 130 sessions in four weeks, which is like 16 hours a day! In total, I have about 700 recordings from around the world.

"The only way you can hear a Never Records track is if you come to an installation, or you listen to one of my radio shows, because I only ever cut two records – one for the artist, which they can use how they like, and one for me, which will one day go to the Library of Congress or the Museum of Modern Art.

"The best part of Never Records is about the fellowship of performance and recorded sound. Vinyl is simply soundwaves etched onto a surface forever. Recording with someone is an intimate thing. It's about capturing the ephemeral, like an insect preserved in amber. I may have bankrupted myself emotionally, financially and physically doing it, but when someone skips out with their warm vinyl, and the experience of making it and learning that it's just a diamond vibrating the soundwaves, it's magic. Vinyl records, for me, are religious objects."

For more, go to neverrecords.store

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C. Visit electronicsound.co.uk/avant to buy this release on its own for £8.99, but be quick because stocks are strictly limited

‘Avant 81’ EP

The Fall – ‘Lie Dream Of A Casino Soul’

Blurt – ‘This Is My Royal Wedding Souvenir’

Jah Wobble – ‘Nocturnal (Edit)’

Mint green vinyl seven-inch

This month’s seven-inch features three brilliant tracks from 1981, each representing a different aspect of the perpetually morphing post-punk underground

PHOTO: INNIS MCALLISTER / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

THE FALL
‘LIE DREAM OF A CASINO SOUL’

The first of the three tracks on our ‘Avant 81’ EP is The Fall’s thunderous and acerbic ‘Lie Dream Of A Casino Soul’. Originally released as the A-side of a single on Kamera Records, it reached the Top Five of the UK independent chart in late 1981. Mark E Smith’s lyrics mention synthesisers, Munich and, improbably, John Foxx.

The avant-pop single marked the start of The Fall’s double drummer era, with Karl Burns and Paul Hanley playing side by side. Hanley was just 16 when he began his five-year stint with Mark E Smith in 1980. His older brother Steve had been playing bass in the band since 1979.

Paul Hanley’s first recording with The Fall was the ‘Grotesque (After The Gramme)’ album, followed by their ‘Slates’ 10-inch EP in early 1981. The latter was produced by Adrian Sherwood.

“The Fall played a massive American tour in 1981, but I didn’t go,” says Hanley, setting the scene for ‘Lie Dream Of A Casino Soul’. “The way it was explained to me was, ‘There’s no way that we could get a work permit for a 17-year-old to play in these over-21 clubs’. So Mark hatched this plan to get the original drummer Karl Burns back in, supposedly just to do the tour.

“When they came back from America, I took over once again and we did some gigs and a John Peel session. Then we went to Iceland and did some recordings that eventually ended up on ‘Hex Enduction Hour’. Then Mark had this summit, where he said he wasn’t happy with how I’d been playing, so he was getting Karl back in and we’d have two drummers. Maybe he thought I’d say, ‘I’m not having this’ and leave, which would avoid him having to sack me. But I thought, ‘Well, that’s fantastic! What an opportunity to play alongside Karl Burns, who’s one of the best drummers in the world!’.

“The ‘Lie Dream’ single was the first thing we did with both Karl and me. I wrote the drum part for the song, ripping it off from a Secret Affair song called ‘Let Your Heart Dance’. Because of the subject matter of ‘Lie Dream’, the fact that it was about northern soul, Mark said he wanted it to be a bit mod, so I thought, ‘Ah, OK!’. It worked well and you could tell that the rest of the band were excited by having two drummers. It spurred them on. Once we started playing live, it was phenomenal.”

North West England was a critical centre of the post-punk scene at this point. But The Fall were a band apart and were not encouraged to fraternise.

“Mark was always at pains for us not to get lumped in with anyone else,” notes Hanley. “We were all incredibly shy anyway, so we were quite insular.”

Did he have a sense of how The Fall fitted in with the broader music scene in the UK in 1981?

“I’ve never thought of The Fall as fitting in with anything. We didn’t really sound like anyone else. It was the same with New Order. I’d say the main things that happened in 1981 were the Buzzcocks splitting up and Joy Division becoming New Order and bringing out ‘Ceremony’. That’s probably still my favourite single of all time. There was a really big shift with that and then The Haçienda opening a year later changed things even more.”

And what does John Foxx know about the lyrical references to him in ‘Lie Dream Of A Casino Soul’?

“I remember the song,” says Foxx. “I don’t know what was in Mark’s head with that one, but no change there. I never felt the need to discuss it with him. He’d use words because he liked how they sounded and how he could crack them together in unique combinations. His ruthless logic and his ability to twist any topic to his own devices was fascinating. And he was the best at it. So audacious you’d be laughing with delight.

“We used to easily drift into an all-nighter,” he continues, referring to his relationship with the Fall frontman. “But Mark was always very stately in his drinking. No unseemly rush. Couple of amps as a chaser. Spectacular piles of empties the day after. And while we’re at it, he was Fiery Jack, Elastic Man, The Chip-Shop Controller. And he cheered everyone up by remaining absolutely and resolutely merciless.”

PHOTO: RICHARD BELLIA

BLURT

‘THIS IS MY ROYAL WEDDING SOUVENIR’

‘Avant 81’ continues with the truly unique ‘This Is My Royal Wedding Souvenir’ by jazz-punk subversives Blurt. The track was first released in 1981 as the flip side of the band’s second single, ‘The Fish Needs A Bike’, which came out on the Armageddon imprint. Packed with incendiary noise and seditious intent, in many ways it’s typical of Blurt, who continue to make a wonderful cacophony to this day.

As you might have guessed, the Royal Wedding in question is the marriage of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer, which took place in July 1981. And as you might imagine, it’s been suggested there’s a touch of irony in the title of the track.

“Of course there is,” sneers Ted Milton, anarcho beat poet, rabble-rousing puppeteer and Blurt frontman. “It’s a very sarcastic recording.”

But more than 40 years on, the track is still strangely pertinent.

“I mean, what is it with this universal forelock?” says Milton, referring to overly deferential behaviour. “Once upon a time you’d hear ‘God bless you guv’, but now the forelock is kind of just underneath the skin of the forehead.”

Warming to his theme, he mentions a passage in Carl Jung’s ‘Memories, Dreams, Reflections’, in which the psychoanalyst recounts taking his first communion at the age of 12. It was administered by his father, who was a pastor. Jung has an epiphany, albeit probably not in the way his dad hoped, and imagines God defecating on a cathedral, a blasphemous thought he tries to suppress before giving in to it.

“People realise that there’s something more powerful than them when a higher power shits on them,” offers Milton. “And the only way you can shit on somebody is determined by the laws of gravity. So you’ve got to be above somebody to do it. This is the very definition of power. And it’s irrefutable, because you’ve been shat on. Get down on your knees! Or even better still, bang your head on the floor several times a day!”

Milton roars with laughter. He’s in his 80s now and he hasn’t mellowed with age. He started his career as a poet in the early 1960s before devising a controversial puppet act he called Mr Pugh’s Blue Show, which involved characters like Inspector Deep Throat Porker and Constable Nosey Parker fellating one another and vomiting up Union Jack bunting. He played theatres and cultural centres, as well as rock venues supporting the likes of Ian Dury, horrifying audiences wherever he went. He also came to the attention of Tony Wilson, who turned up at his home in Stroud to offer him a turn on the Granada TV programme ‘So It Goes’.

After more than a decade of this, Milton wanted a way out. It arrived in the shape of a friend’s saxophone.

“He was going to sell it, but I said to him, ‘Hold on, let’s have a look at it’. It captured my interest. And I played it fantastically, until my neighbours left and sold the building.”

There’s that big, booming, infectious laugh again. Milton’s untethered and ingenious sax playing is at the core of Blurt’s sound and has been since he formed the group in 1979. They were briefly signed to Factory, contributing one side to ‘A Factory Quartet’, a double album split between four bands, but Milton upset Tony Wilson by comparing the label to Habitat. Blurt were a trio at this point, with Peter Creese on guitar and Jake Milton on drums, although Creese plays trombone on ‘This Is My Royal Wedding Souvenir’.

“I think it was the only time we used a trombone and I don’t believe Pete had ever played one before in his life,” says Milton.

Like all of their early material, the track was recorded in a tiny room using a TEAC reel-to-reel. As always, everything was kept as live as possible.

“It was just the way we wanted to do it,” says Milton with a shrug. “I mean, I didn’t know what I was doing. I had no experience of this. Most conventional musicians learn their instruments, get the money to pay for a recording, and then go into the studio. That’s part of the process. But being completely naive about the whole business, we somehow did it this way. And my brother Jake turned out to be very good at it too. I think we managed to get a great sound. I think it worked.”

PHOTO: PETRA GALL / SCHWULES MUSEUM

JAH WOBBLE
'NOCTURNAL (EDIT)'

The last track on 'Avant 81' is an edit of Jah Wobble's 'Nocturnal', a fabulously oddball electro-dub soundscape. The original 1981 cut, which is eight minutes long, was released as a 12-inch on Wobble's own Lago label, alongside two versions of a track called 'Fading'.

Wobble says it's been several years since he last listened to 'Nocturnal', but he revisited it recently. And it would seem to have stimulated a sort of Proustian rush, with the post-punk bass supremo remembering exactly what was going on in his life when he recorded the track, using a home studio he'd set up at his flat in Shadwell, then one of the most deprived parts of London's East End. This was a few months after he had parted company with Public Image Ltd.

"When I heard it the other day, I must admit I thought, 'Fucking hell, that's really good'," he enthuses. "I mean, I was very young when I did it, I was still in my early 20s, and it's quite involved, isn't it?"

Speaking about 'Nocturnal' from a distance of more than four decades, it's clear that the Jah Wobble of the 1980s was a very different person to how he is now. He remembers the period as a time when he found some contentment, despite having left PiL under a cloud.

"I'd been quite ill for a while," he explains. "I always drank a bit too much, but there was this period when I was in Shadwell, spending a lot of time on my own, and that was important for me. I used to go out and walk around the Docklands in the middle of the night, wandering around Wapping and Poplar. There wasn't a Thames Path in those days, but I'd go down to where the old Port of London Authority houses were in Wapping and you'd be jutting right out into the river.

"It felt very atmospheric and I seemed able to lose myself for days on end. I was thinking incredibly deeply about music, but then I've always done that. Even before I joined PiL, actually. I thought about music in abstract terms and I wanted it to be visceral. I'd seen Aston 'Family Man' Barrett playing with Bob Marley at the Lyceum in 1975 and that was massive for me. He only had a piece of wood with four strings, but he somehow managed to plug it directly into the power of the universe."

It's no secret that Wobble is a huge fan of reggae and dub, but the bass technique he employed on 'Nocturnal' was inspired by Jaco Pastorius, the bassist with American jazz fusion legends Weather Report.

"I loved Weather Report, I'd spend hours listening to them, and this was my ham-fisted way of modulating the bass. But what makes it interesting is that it's set against this static background, so then it became very textural."

The weird sound collage that runs throughout certainly adds an unsettling dimension to the track, but it's the bass that ultimately pulls focus. Which is only to be expected.

"I'm doing semitone changes," he notes. "It's probably a Fender Precision with Rotosound strings, by the sounds of it."

Wobble says the other instruments on 'Nocturnal' include a Godwin string synth, a flute and tablas, all of which he played himself. Plus there's a Roland Beatbox, which he also used on 'How Much Are They?', the highly acclaimed EP he crafted with one-time Can men Holger Czukay and Jaki Liebezeit a few months later.

"It's the kind of sound that you'd hear when you went with your girlfriend to the local steakhouse or to the Italian restaurant up the high street, the sort of places with some geezer playing a Bontempi organ in the corner," he says. "You'd get these nobbly-sounding tangos and cha-cha-cha kind of rhythms, but they had a charm to them. I also had a Wasp keyboard at the time, which you can quite clearly hear gliding up and down."

"I had all sorts of gear in that little flat. It was in a building called Dellow House and it was designated 'hard to let', so the rent was eight quid a week. There was a brothel a couple of floors down from me. It was very, very cold in the winter – lots of ice on the inside of the windows – and very, very hot in the summer. I think it was the poorest ward in the entire country, but I was really happy there."

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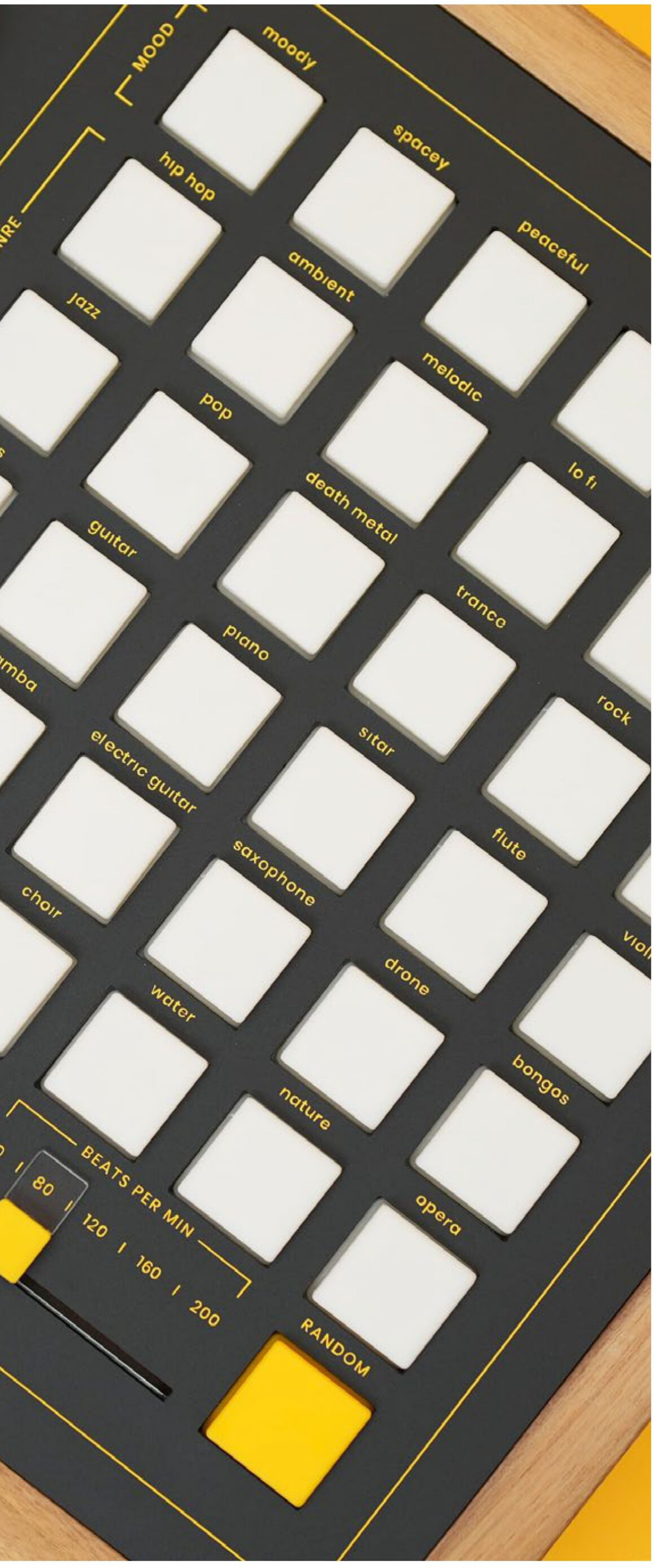


PULSE

CATE HORTL

Club-ready synthpop from France

WHO?

Charlotte Boisselier was once a member of two short-lived duos called Ambeyance and Oktober Lieber, both projects which saw her experimenting with bright, atmospheric electro and gleaming 1980s-inspired pop. And while a hearty selection of these flavours remain now she's flying solo as Cate Hortl, it's immediately clear that her music has taken on an irresistibly darker, freakier tone.

WHY CATE HORTL?

Boisselier has, by her own admission, spent a long time feeling indecisive about the music she wants to make. She's never quite been able to choose between the raw, relentless energy of club music and the eerie melodies that typify dark pop. But now she's found the best of both worlds, seamlessly combining the throb of beats that evoke sticky, sweaty nights at your favourite backstreet haunt, buoyed by synth work that both dazzles and unsettles. Her vocals tend to remain either buried in the mix, or slathered in reverb and other effects, which only serves to heighten the stylish otherworldly core of her sound.

TELL US MORE...

Boisselier has released a handful of pieces as Cate Hortl, including the single 'Get Out Of Your Habits' in 2021, a five-track EP titled 'Smog' in the same year, and another single, 'Hex', in 2022. Her latest release 'CF007' for Parisian label Club Forever, which came out late last year, is by far her most accomplished yet. Stabs of melody, framed by feverish percussion, are whipped into a euphoric frenzy on the opener 'Burnt Back'. Though it's the flip-side 'Sssss' which steals the show, the nifty synth riff and clattering rhythms tumbling into a hypnotic, deliciously nightmarish climax. Boisselier might have made claims to the contrary, but there's no indecision in sight here – just fearless, enthralling dark electro that positively drips with barefaced originality. Spine-tingling ssssstuff.

IMOGEN BEBB

'CF007' is out now on Club Forever

NEEDS MUST

Freewheeling through time and space, **Kris Needs** continues his adventures in sound. This month: **Nina's Rare Early Electronic Diamonds**

The last few weeks have been spent moving into our remote new HQ – arduous in the extreme but awash with highlights, such as unpacking and filing Nina Walsh's record collection from dozens of boxes. Nestled between Weatherall-related curios and rarities guaranteed to send devotees into apoplectic masturbation rituals, lay numerous albums from when synths had arrived as either a portal into making unknown future music, electronic Crazy Foam to squirt over existing forms, or novelty makeovers in the tradition of surfing or Hawaiian guitar sets.

An already revered landmark loomed in the shape of 'A New Exciting Experience', The Free Pop Electronic Concept's 1969 Belgium-spawned one-off featuring the Lameirinhas brothers – aka soul duo Jess & James – and band, hooking up with veteran electronic pioneer Arsène Souffriau, who released 1963's 'Musique Electronique 1963' single.

Appearing at that heady time when musical strains were mating like rabbits stuck in a lift, the band cooked up robustly funky percussive grooves, from Spooky Tooth shuffles and soul vamps to psychedelic go-go disco frug-ups with titles like 'Chewing Gum Delirium' and 'Cosmos Rhythms', over which Arsène uncorks synthesised meteor showers, hallucinogenic gerbil squirts and robot-on-the-bog space squeals. Deliriously of its time.

Or there's French circuit trailblazer and early Ondioline exponent Jean-Jacques Perrey, who released some of the first commercial Moog tunes with composer Gershon Kingsley and unleashed a prolific string of the electronic pop crystalised by 1968's 'The Amazing New Electronic Pop Sound Of Jean Jacques Perrey' on titles such as 'The Little Girl From Mars' and 'The Minuet Of The Robots'. Intricately spliced, cartoon-quirky as it sploshes and bloops, Perrey joyfully succeeds in his mission to "bring the new electronic sonorities to pop music."

The whole spectrum is in this collection, from Cage and Hyman to the Moog cover version sets that may have dated, but retain their period charm, including 1973's immortal 'Moog Party Time'. With its jaunty electro-romps through lynchpins 'Popcorn' and 'Son Of My Father' plus Neil Diamond covers and other irrepressibly sprightly outings, it backs up the cover's claim to "amply illustrate the range and versatility of the Moog Synthesiser… happy sounds are generated by this miracle of modern electronics".

While Nina's buckling shelves provide a fresh fountain of vinyl frolics for this column – plus the odd BJ Thomas LP! – for resonance, it's hard to beat those fascinating but poignant 12-inch singles inscribed by Mr Weatherall with bpms and DJ memory jerkers.

NOTES TO SELF

Gloucestershire weekender hits the mark

Held on 21/22 September at several locations across Stroud, Hidden Notes is a festival you won't want to miss. Headlining this year's fourth edition are Buchla supremo Suzanne Ciani and the Will Gregory Moog Ensemble, but there's loads more besides, such as harpist Mary Lattimore, Brussels' Echo Collective and a new project between legendary producer Gareth Jones and Electronic Sound contributor William J Stokes. Meanwhile, expect film screenings and book readings galore, including one from Ben Murphy (another Electronic Sound vet) who will be discussing his upcoming tome, 'Ears To The Ground: Adventures In Field Recording And Electronic Music'. Weekend tickets are only £90, and day passes are roughly half of that. Hop to it. **hiddennotes.co.uk**

WHAT GOES DOWN MUST COME UP

Clip surfaces of Ultravox at work

Footage has emerged from the BBC Archive of Ultravox in the studio in February 1984, and it's well worth a gander on YouTube. Originally broadcast as part of the BBC Schools' 'Science Topics' programme, the segment, titled 'Ultravox And The Synthesiser', takes a glimpse into the band's working practice on their 'Lament' album, with a set-up that includes a LinnDrum, a Yamaha CS-80 and more. Midge Ure talks about the Minimoog and its use on 'Vienna', even demonstrating the track's bassline. "Technology's moved on far too much to sell people things like this anymore," he says. "It's an antique synthesiser now. It's like, 15 years old!". **youtube.com**

LLYN Y CWN

MEGALITHS. CD / DIGITAL OUT NOW

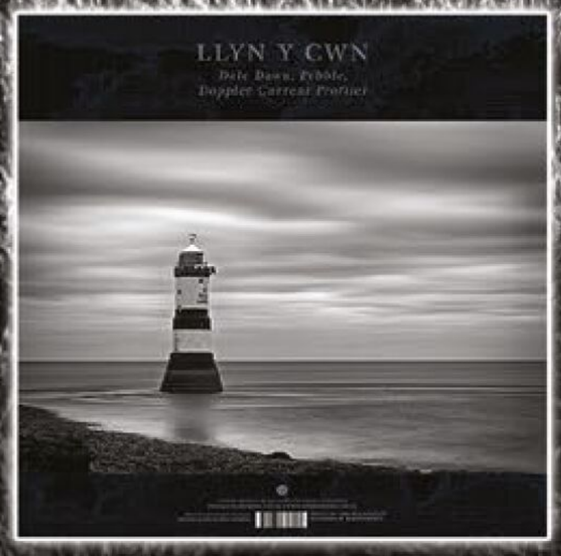
A profound dark ambient exploration of stone circles and burial chambers.

Ben Powell is an electronics technician for the School of Ocean Sciences at Bangor University. His field recordings are captured on scientific research cruises in the arctic, on Russian, British and Canadian icebreakers, as well as desolate locations in his native Wales.

SCAN ME

YouTube

Also available from LLYN Y CWN:



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Edwin Pouncey, aka **Savage Pencil**, walks us through his iconic cover art for The Fall's 1981 seven-inch, 'Lie Dream Of A Casino Soul'

WORDS: ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH

When Edwin Pouncey first got namechecked by Mark E Smith, he was sitting alone in his home office, having just bought The Fall's 1979 album 'Dragnet'.

"'Your Heart Out' came on, and in that moment I was absolutely amazed to hear him mention me," says Edwin, the surprise still perceptible after all these years. "I think it goes something like, 'Don't cry for me / Or Mexico / Or *Savage Pencil* / I'm nearly healthy'. I thought, 'Wow!'. I was absolutely honoured, thrilled… and even better, it was etched onto vinyl forever."

To find yourself on Mark's list was not always a good thing, as history attests. Countless individuals have been verbally battered by the Prestwich misfit's unforgiving and unsavoury tongue, including most famously the frontman of LCD Soundsystem: "James Murphy is their chief / They show their bollocks when they eat". Ouch.

Edwin was not a member of that unfortunate club. Instead, it appeared Mark was giving him a nod of acknowledgement – if not a complimentary wink – with his lyric being a direct reference to Edwin's comic strip Rock 'N' Roll Zoo, which appeared in the music paper Sounds.

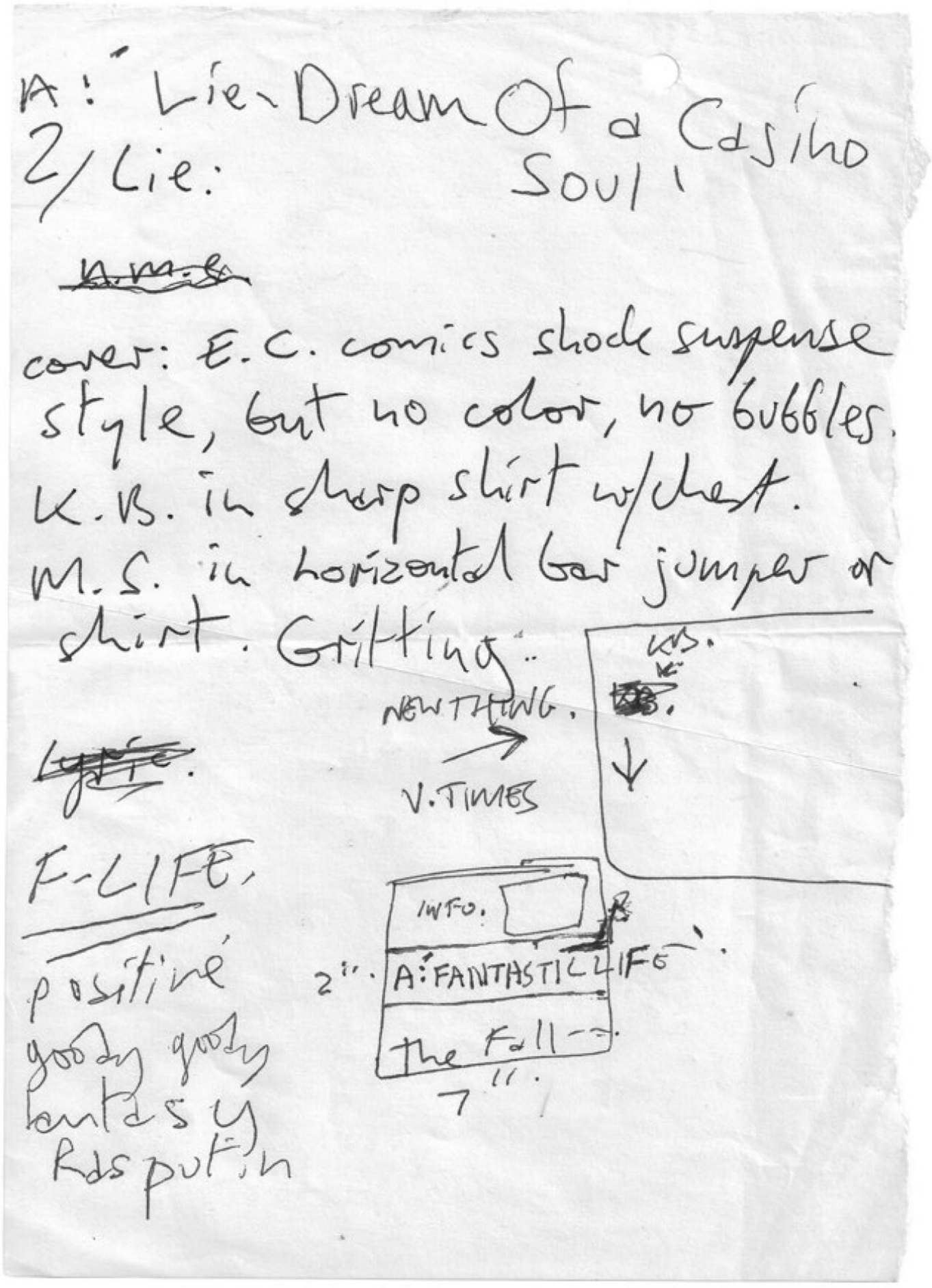
"I was always commenting on the week's happenings," explains Edwin. "One time, a news story had come in about Mark being beaten-up for not being a punk and refusing to wear all the typical punk stuff. So I drew him being beaten up by a group of riled-up skinheads, saying, 'Why are you beating me up? Why aren't you beating up a hippie?'. I was obviously glad that he seemed to think it was kind of funny."

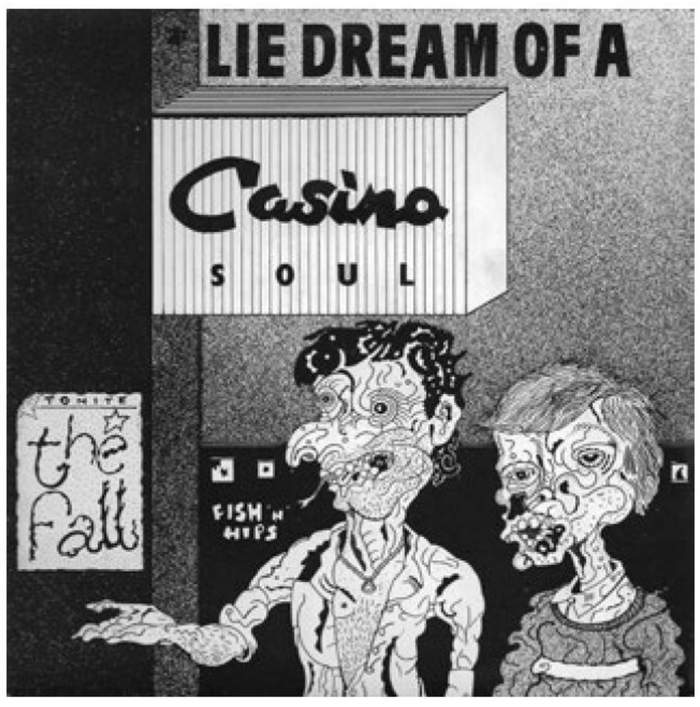
It was the beginning of what Edwin calls "a kind of creative relationship" between the two, which included an interview and regular hang-outs via a mutual friend, the infamous French counterculturalist Claude Bessy.

"Claude used to work at Rough Trade doing stuff behind the scenes," says Edwin. "He knew Mark, and The Fall had just signed to the label, so we started meeting up at parties. They were just booze-ups really, I can't imagine any food was being eaten – maybe a few crisps, but not many.

"Mark was very affable whenever we met, and we got into some deep conversations about weird literature. We were both admirers of certain writers like MR James, HP Lovecraft and especially Arthur Machen. We also talked quite a bit about music. Again, we had similar tastes and rated The Mothers Of Invention and Captain Beefheart highly, together with reggae artists such as Prince Jazzbo and Big Youth."

In 1981, The Fall left Rough Trade to sign to Kamera Records, with their new single, 'Lie Dream Of A Casino Soul', in the offing. Edwin had heard rumours that Mark might choose him to draw something for the cover.





Then one day, he received a letter containing a short, scrawled note outlining his mission. On a tiny piece of ripped-up paper, Mark had detailed the overall aesthetic of the cover was to riff on the style of 1950s Shock SuspenStories by EC Comics.

This series was notorious for its gruesome content, including but not limited to murders, rapes and racist attacks, with a particularly contentious issue in 1954 leading to the publisher Bill Gaines being questioned by the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency. Mark also stated that he wanted "no color, no bubbles", though some of his other instructions left rather a lot open to interpretation.

"'*Positive goody-goody fantasy Rasputin*'," says Edwin. "I thought, 'What the hell does that mean?'. I think I just had a rummage around and found an old horror pulp paperback, which had this insane Rasputin-looking thing with bat wings. I just ripped it off. And that became Karl Burns. Mark had specified 'with chest', so I showed him wearing a medallion too.

"And 'gritting'? I couldn't really tell you what he meant by that. I supposed he meant 'gritty', so I decided to run with that. To make it, I used Letratone, a rubbed-down pattern thing you get from Letraset. That's how I got the background to look the way it does."

Then came the really scary bit – drawing Mark E Smith himself. With his only instruction being to depict Mark wearing "a bar jumper or shirt", Edwin didn't hold back, drawing the band's frontman as an emaciated and decaying gap-toothed zombie – though, of course, still sporting his granny jumper.

After several days spent scribbling and adding an inspired "FISH 'n' HIPS" sign where the neon had gone out on the "C", Edwin finished the job and handed it in. Then he waited. And waited. And waited some more.

"I never heard back," he says in disbelief. "Mark never rang up. I didn't get any response at all really, it just came out. I eventually heard on the grapevine that he did like it, but also that he said something like, 'Oh yeah, Savage Pencil, I asked him to do this thing and he drew us all like *monsterssss*'. But I think he *did* like being drawn as a monster!

"I didn't even get the artwork back, annoyingly. I've tried hunting it down, but I don't know where it is. It probably ranks as one of my more famous works. It just felt right when it was finished and so it proved to be – people are always interested in it. So whoever's got it has one of my best works, really… grrrrrrrrrr. Please return to sender."

For more of Savage Pencil's work, visit instagram.com/flyzruz

THE SCHOOL OF ELECTRONIC MUSIC

Resident archivist **Jack Dangers** checks out '**Cuenca**', an album by Spanish composer Eduardo Polonio

The album 'Cuenca' by Eduardo Polonio is what you might call "neo-concrète", or perhaps "post-concrète". "Concrète post", even. It came out in 1988, on a label called Nuevos Medios, which means New Media. The title track is dated 1985, and other pieces on the album go as far back as 1969, so he's been around for quite a while, and he's still releasing material. He uses a Synthi 100, though it's wrongly spelled Sinthi 100 on the sleeve.

When I bought my Synthi 100 in the 90s, I researched them and more or less tracked them all down. I knew how many EMS had made and where they all went. I knew there was a studio in Spain which had the only Synthi 100 made in four separate units. So rather than being one giant synth, it was more like a Moog Modular. It was the only one they made like that. There's nothing online about it and no pictures. Who knows where it ended up, but it was in Spain, so it could have been the one Polonio used.

This album also features a Minimoog (spelled Mini Moog), a Polymoog (Poly Moog) an EMS AKS – which sounds different to the Synthi 100, though it's similar to the VCS 3 – and a Yamaha CX5M II, which was a music computer system with a built-in 8-voice FM synth module.

Polonio was born in Madrid in 1941 and began training at the Engineering and Telecommunications School there before dropping out and switching to the Royal Conservatory of Music, where he studied piano and composition. In the second half of the 1960s, he enrolled in the Darmstadt Summer School, where Stockhausen ruled supreme.

After graduating from the Royal Conservatory, Polonio trained at the Psychoacoustics and Electronic Music Institute at the University of Ghent which, at that time, was an electronic music studio funded by the university and the Belgian national broadcaster. From 1970 to 1972, he was a member of a Spanish group called Alea Música Electrónica Libre, who performed electroacoustic music live. Since then, he's been involved with various avant-garde/new music ensembles and studios and has composed two electroacoustic operas.

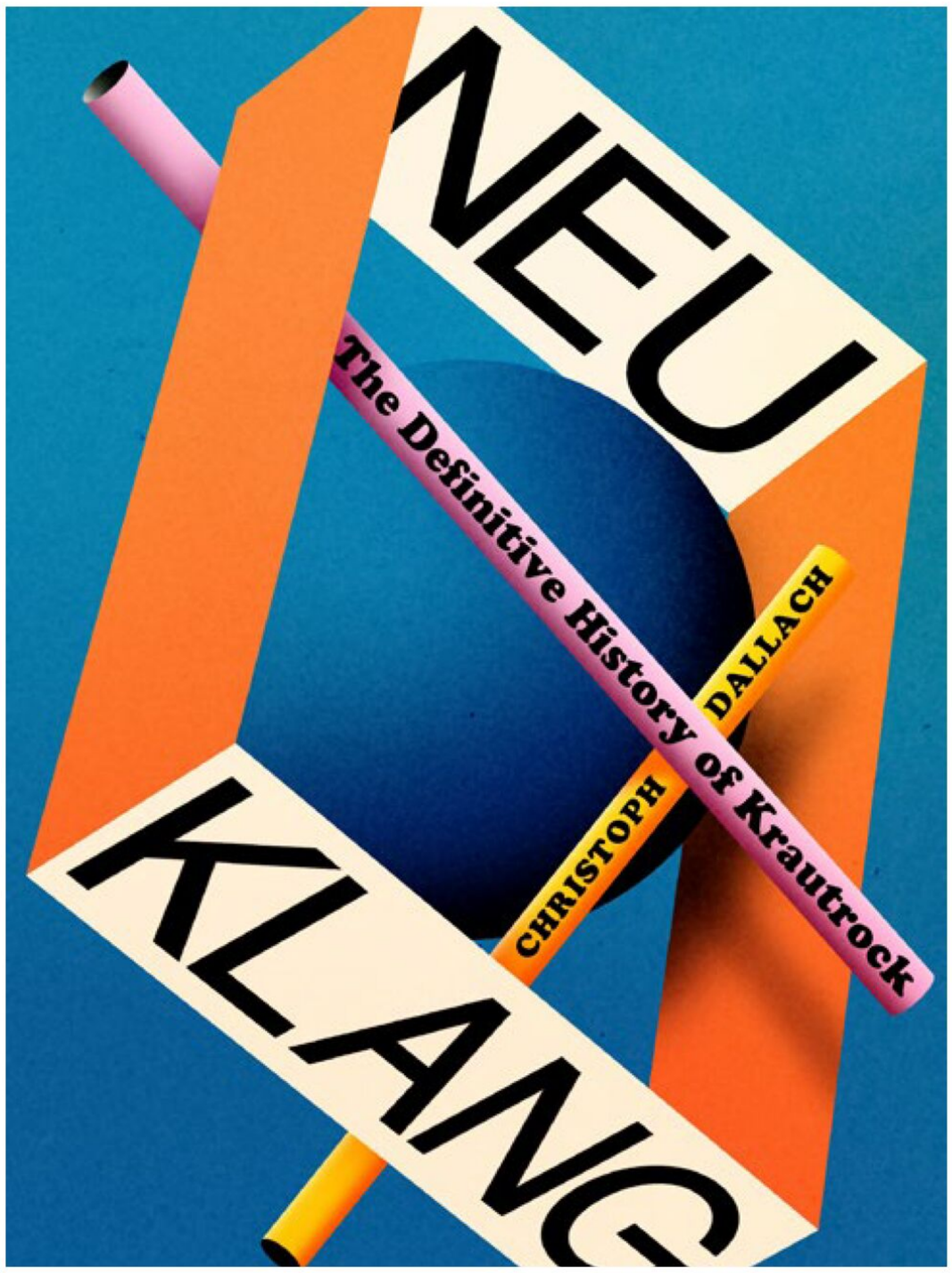
He doesn't have a massive discography – maybe around 10 releases under his own name – but he appears on dozens of compilations and is a central figure in the history of Spanish electroacoustic music.

NEU KID ON THE BLOCK

Oral history of krautrock is a must-buy

Expectations were high when 'Neu Klang: The Definitive History Of Krautrock' was announced, but author and editor Christoph Dallach hits a home run with this fab (and first-ever) oral history of the German movement. Featuring a roll call to be envious of – from Kraftwerk's Karl Bartos and Neu!'s Michael Rother to Can's Irmin Schmidt, Brian Eno and many more – it's about much more than just the music.

"The beginning covers growing up in post-war Germany," says Dallach. "The Nazi teachers, the silent fathers, plus the birth of the idea to find a new, unique language through art, and a way of life." It also locks horns with the slippery debate around competing terms krautrock and kosmische. "You could fill a book with that question," laughs Dallach. "Mine starts with the term krautrock and asks what all the musicians think about it, but it's also clear that krautrock is not a sound, but an idea that all these individuals share." Curious? You should be. Order a hardback direct from our shop before they sell out. **electronicsound.co.uk/shop**



TOUCHING BASS

Black British sonics told in full

Opening at the British Library on 26 April is 'Beyond The Bassline', an exhibition documenting 500 years of Black British music culture. Featuring over 200 individual artefacts – from letters written by the 18th century composer, writer and abolitionist Ignatius Sancho, to lo-fi recording equipment used by the late SBTV founder and grime documentarian Jamal Edwards – the show also draws on the library's vast sound archive, which holds 1.5 million recordings. Running until the end of August, tickets are £15. **bl.uk**

SHHHHHHHYNTHESISER

Welcome to the UK's first synth library

The Glasgow Library Of Synthesized Sound (GLOSS) is the UK's first community-based, non-profit and artist-led synth library (pause for applause). Launched last year by Suzi and Lewis Cook of Scottish electropoppers Free Love, their focus is on running events and free workshop programmes in the hope of introducing the fundamentals of electronic music – both "practically and contextually" – to anyone who wants to get involved.

"We started this project by thinking of electronic music as a folk tradition, which we have inherited and are part of," says Lewis. "In that sense, it's our duty to share not only the techniques, but also the culture and meaning."

As well as leading introductory workshops for beginners, they've been working with more experienced artists to help develop their practice and offer the opportunity for collaboration. This year, they plan to roll out memberships and a pop-up library service where people can borrow a range of gear.

"Electronic music, more than any other kind of music, can sometimes feel like a bit of a solitary affair," continues Lewis. "You can learn all you need to start making music with YouTube tutorials and a bit of enthusiasm, but it can often lead to lots of people sitting on hard drives full of finished and half-finished tracks.

"It's the antithesis of the social purpose of music, which shouldn't exist to feed an algorithm – the opposite should be true. In order for that to be the case, there needs to be a culture and community to substantiate that. Places and platforms for people to connect ideas and make sense of it are an essential component, and we're doing our best to contribute to that."

Applications for this year's Introduction To Electronic Music course are now closed, but make sure you're on the GLOSS mailing list so you can hear about the next series, which is set to take place at the start of 2025. On top of that, if you have any instruments lying about (or cash, for that matter), they're actively seeking donations to help them achieve their goals. All power to these electronic adventurers. **gloss.scot**

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Big solutions for modular systems

If you're lucky enough to own a wall-sized collection of Eurorack modules, then you might be tempted by the Megarack case from Latvian developer Erica Synths. As a fully powered, all-aluminium tower offering a staggering eight 3U rows of rack space, it also features connectors on the top for gooseneck lamps to help you illuminate your arsenal. "The Erica Synths Megarack case is for those who take Eurorack seriously," say Erica Synths, who maintain that it's about as sleek and elegant a solution as you'll likely find for £1,500. We'd be inclined to agree. **ericasynths.lv**

Man Parrish tells the blistering story behind his futuristic and uncompromising 1982 floorfiller **'Hip Hop, Be Bop (Don't Stop)'** – barks and all

INTERVIEW: ROBERT HARRIS

"I was living in New York, in a loft on 14th and 9th Street. Like most folks downtown at the time, I was poor and dysfunctional, and every night I'd hang out at places like Max's Kansas City and the Mudd Club. I got by making music. In my teens, I built my own synth and I'm still fascinated by new technology. I made the money to eat and invest in new gear by basically fixing tracks for other people. If someone had a problem, it'd be, 'Hey, call Manny. Give him 50 bucks. He'll make you sound modern and cool'.

"I had all sorts of people stop by the loft – Liquid Liquid, Steve Bronski, Klaus Nomi, Steve Strange, Boy George, and Village People – who I later managed. I bought more and more equipment, which attracted more and more people. There were so many that I can't really remember. I'd also been paid to produce the soundtrack for a porn movie called 'Heatstroke'.

"One day somebody said, 'Manny, they're playing your song at The Anvil!'. At this point, I didn't actually have a record out, so I thought I better go have a look. The Anvil was an infamous sex bar just down the block, full of fabulous drag queens and leather boys. I'd never been, but when I did I thought, 'I'm home'. The DJ was playing my track. He'd made an acetate from the Betamax tape – moans, groans and all. When I told him it was my music, he said he needed to introduce me to somebody, and that was 'Captain Mike' Wilkinson.

"Mike was a Harvard graduate and a successful advertising guy. But, out of the broom cupboard, he also ran something called the Disconet Service, which released 12-inch edits of club hits for DJs. Mike was interested in pressing up 'Heatstroke', but being a businessman, what he really wanted was an album since the profit margin was far greater. Mike's right-hand man was Raul Rodriguez, who was a DJ at clubs like New York-New York, and he sent Raul to my loft to see what else I had. We then spent days going through hundreds of tapes, eventually narrowing it down to eight or nine tracks.

"Everything had been made at home, on my TASCAM 8-track, so to make them sound more professional we worked on them further at Vanguard Studios. Vanguard was a jazz label, but in the history of New York music it's incredibly important, because they'd hire out their studios overnight, super-cheap. $100 would get you an 8pm to 6am session. It was our Muscle Shoals. It was a basic set-up – a 24-track board and a plate reverb – so I'd bring in my own equipment in garbage bags, with my heart in my mouth, on the subway. I couldn't afford a cab.

"There were no computers, no samplers, no MIDI, no SMPTE, and every 12 bars or so things would go out of sync. To fix this, I'd have to record a part, roll the tape back a few bars and on the downbeat of one, record another.

In this way, I built multiple sequences when there were no sequencers. It was very intense manual labour, but I got to be good – and fast – which is what got me all the other gigs. Music has never taken me long to make. I have a form of synaesthesia and see sounds as shapes. We'd often complete records overnight – start to finish.

"To be honest, I saw 'Hip Hop, Be Bop' as an album filler. It was all built around the TR-808. I always build from the drums up. The bassline was a Prophet Pro-7. The tumbling tom-toms aren't drums, but a Prophet-5. I created the sort of sucking sound by holding down a note, sending that through a filter, which I swept by hand before releasing the key. I put a load of handclaps in line, and they just became something else.

"I had an Oberheim Xpander module, because I couldn't afford the whole 8-voice unit. I triggered everything through patterns that I programmed on the 808. John Robie came up with the melody for which, unbeknown to me, he received one third of the writing. Raul got another third for basically keeping an eye on what I was doing – making sure I wasn't hiring symphony orchestras. Mike promised them points, rather than pay them upfront.

"It was felt that the track needed a vocal. Raul had taken me to a club called the Fun House, where we'd hang out in the booth with the DJ – John 'Jellybean' Benitez. There, the kids in the crowd would do this weird thing… if they liked what the DJ played, they would bark. The first time I heard this I thought there was a fire or a bomb had gone off. I thought if we put barking on 'Hip Hop, Be Bop', it would be kinda cute. A pop art reference to the streets, our surroundings. On the record, it's me and Raul. Mainly Raul – he had the better bark.

"We had a test pressing made – you could get these for like 20 bucks – and took it to Jellybean at the club. I'd never had anything of mine played, so was extremely nervous. He mixed it in, the barks rang out, and for seconds that felt far longer, everything fell silent. I thought, 'Oh my god, they hate it!'. And then the place exploded. I'm getting goosebumps talking about it. The whole Fun House was barking back. These were kids who weren't used to being noticed or listened to. It showed that we had.

"I thought Jellybean would just play the record once, but he said, 'I've never had a reaction like that. Can I keep this?'. That's what made 'Hip Hop, Be Bop' go from filler to single. My choice for a single was 'Together Again'. I wanted a proper song – verse, chorus, bridge – something that could be a hit on the radio. I wanted to be Depeche Mode, Yazoo… Vince Clarke. However, in hindsight, 'Hip Hop, Be Bop' really captured an important cultural moment."

HEAR NO EVIL, SPEAKER NO EVIL

New towers tick all the boxes

British audiophiles Q Acoustics have appeared on these pages many a time, but their latest range of M40-powered micro-towers really are something to write home about. These little beasts are wireless and aptX HD Bluetooth enabled, so they can connect to a whole array of devices, while also packing a punch with their C3 Continuous Curved Cone design to “ensure smooth, nuanced tweeter integration and extremely capable but controlled bass”. And they aren’t too hard on the eyes, either. Available now for £749. **qacoustics.co.uk**

SHOOT THE SHOT

The Kodak Super 8 returns

After first being announced at the 2016 Consumer Electronics Show, Kodak are now rolling out a brand-spanking new Super 8 camera, featuring an array of updates for the 21st century. Four-inch viewfinder? Check. Micro USB charging ports? Of course. LCD viewfinder? You betcha. Getting your mitts on one will be no easy feat, though. They're currently "reservation only". You have to state your work and whether you already own a Super 8, and on top of that, you'll have to withdraw a cool £4,300. Let's not even bother calculating what that would have got you in 1965. **kodak.com**

RIDING THE WAVS

Electronic music gives you wings, say scientists

A recent study has concluded that electronic music appears to alter our state of consciousness. We know what you're thinking – where were those researchers in 1987? But this time, a group of neuroscientists from the University of Barcelona wanted to delve deeper, looking at synchronisation between brainwave activity and external stimulus from electronic music at various frequencies.

"Music's universality intrigues me, as uncovering universals in human behaviour is rare and suggests underlying biological roots," says Raquel Aparicio Terrés, one of the four authors. While more research is required, she adds that "comprehending the brain mechanisms underpinning altered states of consciousness may guide therapeutic strategies for consciousness-related disorders", and that soundwaves could be used "as a therapy to alleviate patient stress and enhance well-being during medical procedures". That's right, friends – the day a 12-inch record is made available by your GP draws ever nearer. **osf.io/nkzcg**

PULSE

MASAKA MASAKA

Ugandan electronicist to watch

WHO?

The name is Ian Nnyanzi, a young producer whose output as Masaka Masaka cuts breathlessly across a spectrum of sounds – dark electro, ambient, garbled breaks and more. Imagine the sounds of Dean Blunt, Burial and Jlin rolled together, then inhaled and regurgitated through the eyes and ears of someone growing up in Kampala, Uganda's capital city.

WHY MASAKA MASAKA?

Hands-in-the-air stuff this is not, but there's an introverted emotiveness here that hits you hard in the gut. "My general body of work is driven to open possibilities for any person who feels inertia in their life," says Ian. "I often found myself working late into the night composing or even in the early mornings before heading to work. In the end, these influences intertwined with memories and nostalgia, manifesting in a dream-like art form." You'll find all of that good stuff and more on Ian's eclectic debut album 'Barely Making Much', which is out this month on Kampala label Hakuna Kulala. Despite being so diverse in style that it occasionally comes unstuck, make no mistake, this is red-hot, urgent music with a story to tell. You hear it driving right at you on the skittish footwork of 'Come With Me To Goma', or on the woozy, broken hip hop of 'NRG', all mixed up and so moreish you can't help but skip back to the start.

TELL US MORE...

Ian describes film as his greatest influence, which partly explains why his music feels so cinematic. "Growing up, I often enjoyed going to cinema halls, and learning about how music plays a very important role in shaping films and in the way we choose to remember them. At some point, I want to work in film to tell more stories from the continent, which definitely comes with opportunities to build and create new worlds."

ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH

'Barely Making Much' is out now on Hakuna Kulala

Saint Etienne man **Bob Stanley**'s recent compilation 'Fantastic Voyage' documents the "echo chamber" effect that David Bowie's Berlin recordings had on European music. No surprise then that Bowie is one of his key influences...

INTERVIEW: BEN GILBERT

RECORD COLLECTING

"As far back as I can remember, I was fascinated with records. Growing up in Croydon, we had the biggest second-hand record shop in the country – Beanos. Pete Wiggs and I both got Saturday jobs, and I'd go in there and spend all my money as soon as I finished work. That was the beginning of the end. I had to make a career out of it to justify my collection. I've got a seven-inch copy of every UK Number One from the 1950s to the 1990s, except 'Answer Me' by David Whitfield, and I still buy records all the time – probably five singles and a couple of albums a week.

"I have tens of thousands but they're not in my house. They wouldn't fit. The collection's now a working archive, housed in an office in Bradford near where I live. It gives me a lot of existential fear and makes me think, 'What have I got them for?'. My favourite seven-inch is probably a demo copy of 'FBI' by The Shadows, which my dad gave me. It got lost, but a few years ago I found another copy from a seller in Crouch End. He let me have it for nothing, which was very generous. That was a proper 'Rosebud' moment because I'd been after it for years."

"HEY HEY WE'RE THE MONKEES"

"The Monkees represent pop in a very pure sense because of the way their music was put together, but they're still four individuals who are interesting characters in real life. They had the Brill Building writing songs for them and the best producers. That's the way to make great pop music. I'd already seen every episode of the TV show before watching 'Head'. It's such an incredible film, genuinely psychedelic, beautifully shot and well-structured, but it also has this trademark humour because it was written by the same people.

"I love 'Slade In Flame', but 'Head' is a better comment on the music industry. The dialogue on the soundtrack was also a big influence on Saint Etienne. That and 'The Who Sell Out' were why 'So Tough' had all the links between tracks. It makes for a more cohesive album. Skits were quite common in 90s hip hop but it wasn't something people did in pop or rock."

THE BRITISH LIBRARY

"When I was writing 'Yeah Yeah Yeah: The Story Of Modern Pop', I'd go into The British Library three days a week. It's a beautiful building with a serene atmosphere. To stop myself nodding off, I'd see who was around for a cup of tea. It might be the writer Travis Elborough, Caroline Catz – who made the film 'Delia Derbyshire: The Myths And The Legendary Tapes' – or the Londonographer Rob Baker.

"I won the 2017 Eccles British Library Writer's Award before starting work on 'Let's Do It: The Birth Of Pop'. I had a very sketchy knowledge of the era and there was scant detail in the archive. Billboard and Variety were useful, but what I found particularly helpful was The British Library's sound archive and publications like The New Yorker. They ran a profile on Duke Ellington in the 1940s. I found out his band couldn't get served in the buffet car of a regular train because they were black. So he bought his own train!"

‘TWIN PEAKS’

“My introduction to David Lynch was ‘The Elephant Man’, which I saw on TV. I thought it was incredible. I was a regular Smash Hits reader, particularly the Personal File column. Musicians would always say their favourite film was ‘Eraserhead’. It could be Pete Wylie or Suggs – quite varied people. Video shops were becoming more common and one of the first films me and Pete rented was ‘Eraserhead’, which blew us away.

“When ‘Twin Peaks’ came out, I was in my mid-20s and already a big fan. On the first and second Saint Etienne albums, we were listening to a lot of Joe Meek and Phil Spector, slightly uncanny late 50s and early 60s pop, which obviously Lynch runs with. I loved the depth of the characters, how the show looked, different plots and how it stays in your memory. Along with ‘Mad Men’ and ‘Match Of The Day’, it’s probably the greatest TV series of them all.”

DAVID BOWIE

“My favourite Bowie period changes all the time. ‘Station To Station’ is possibly my favourite album. I’m fascinated by his suburban London years, when he’s not a success. I grew up in Croydon and him in Bromley, so it’s very relatable. The songs about moving to London, where it’s a massive disappointment, and then back to build a mythology in Haddon Hall [the gothic mansion in Beckenham where Bowie wrote most of ‘Hunky Dory’] – that period is interesting musically because there’s some of the few songs where he sounds fallible, like ‘Conversation Piece’.

“Bowie’s death was a total shock. He’d been denying he was ill for so long. ‘Where Are We Now?’ was lovely and very moving, but I haven’t listened to the final album, ‘Blackstar’. I couldn’t at the time. I never met him but it still felt quite personal. At some point, I’ll sit down and listen to it.”

MODERNISM

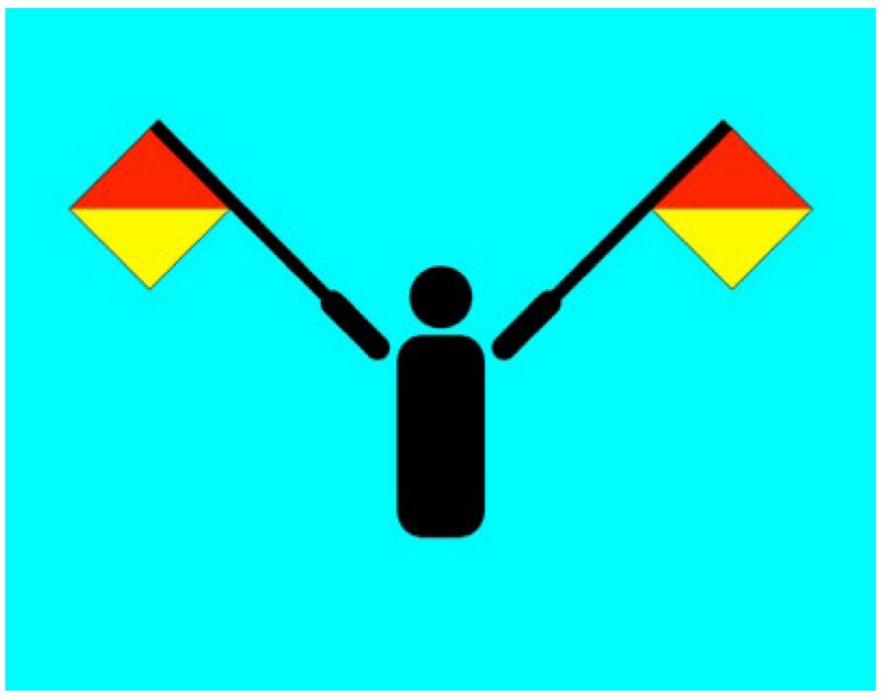
“Making compilations is a proper dream and something I wanted to do when I was a kid. Thinking about music from the past and trying to find links is what my books are about. The BFI’s Jason Wood and I put together ‘Cafe Exil’ in 2020. That was material Bowie could have heard when he was in Europe making ‘Low’ and ‘“Heroes”’. The sequel – ‘Fantastic Voyage’ – is music influenced by ‘Lodger’ and ‘Scary Monsters’ – like an echo chamber of him.

“The cover is the Atomium, which was the centrepiece of the 1958 Brussels World’s Fair. For ‘Cafe Exil’, we wanted a futuristic, unique-looking building in continental Europe. It’s a restaurant above a subway station in Berlin, which is still there but has been empty for years. Saint Etienne visited in 2000 during recordings for ‘Sound Of Water’. It hadn’t changed much since opening and was quite tatty, but the staff still thought it was a high-end restaurant. There was a special asparagus menu, which they were very proud of. We thought, ‘Who has a special asparagus menu?!’.”

‘Fantastic Voyage: New Sounds For The European Canon 1977-1981’ is out now on Ace

BANGING ON

More random musings from **Fat Roland**. On his mind this month (as far as we can tell) are **Guest Rappers**



There was a period in pop history when songs weren't good enough so they had to get someone in to talk all over them. The talkers were called guest rappers. They would often appear in the middle eight section of the song, which is the bit after and before all the other eights. They would rap things like "Look at my Bugatti / I'm wearing a cool hatty" and "Why aren't the Stereophonics / On the cover of Sound, Electronics". Guest raps are useful because it means a singer can have a bit of a nap mid-song as long as they don't snore.

My favourite guest rapper is the one I'm about to google for you right now. Hold on, let me just… no, that's Google Maps. Oh here we go – Jay Zed. Apparently, there's a rapman called Jay Zed. He's my coolest favourite one, waffling how crazy he is all over Beyoncé.

Of course, the most famous best guest rap was when Fat Roland's Oompah Jazz Fusionists had the whole of Public Enemy reciting haikus. Chuckles D really knows how to count syllables. That collaboration hasn't actually happened yet, but they'll reply to my letters one day, I'm sure.

I've given my mate Bagger a guest rap in this column. He's the perfect rapman – he's got gold teeth and an 18-wheeler, which I think is some kind of lorry or something. Take it away, Bagsy. "What, now?" Yes now, it's time for your guest words. "But I can't think of anything to say, Roland." Mate, we talked about this. Crack on with it before my readers get confused. "Erm, alright then, um… 'Hip hop, bippety bop / Gonna step on the, um, gas / Truckin' all over yo ass'. Will that do, Roland?" Bagger, that was rubbish. I knew this was a terrible idea. "You didn't say it had to be good – do I get my five pounds like you promised?" Alright, Bagsy, here's three quid. I'll give you the rest later, once you've finished washing my car.

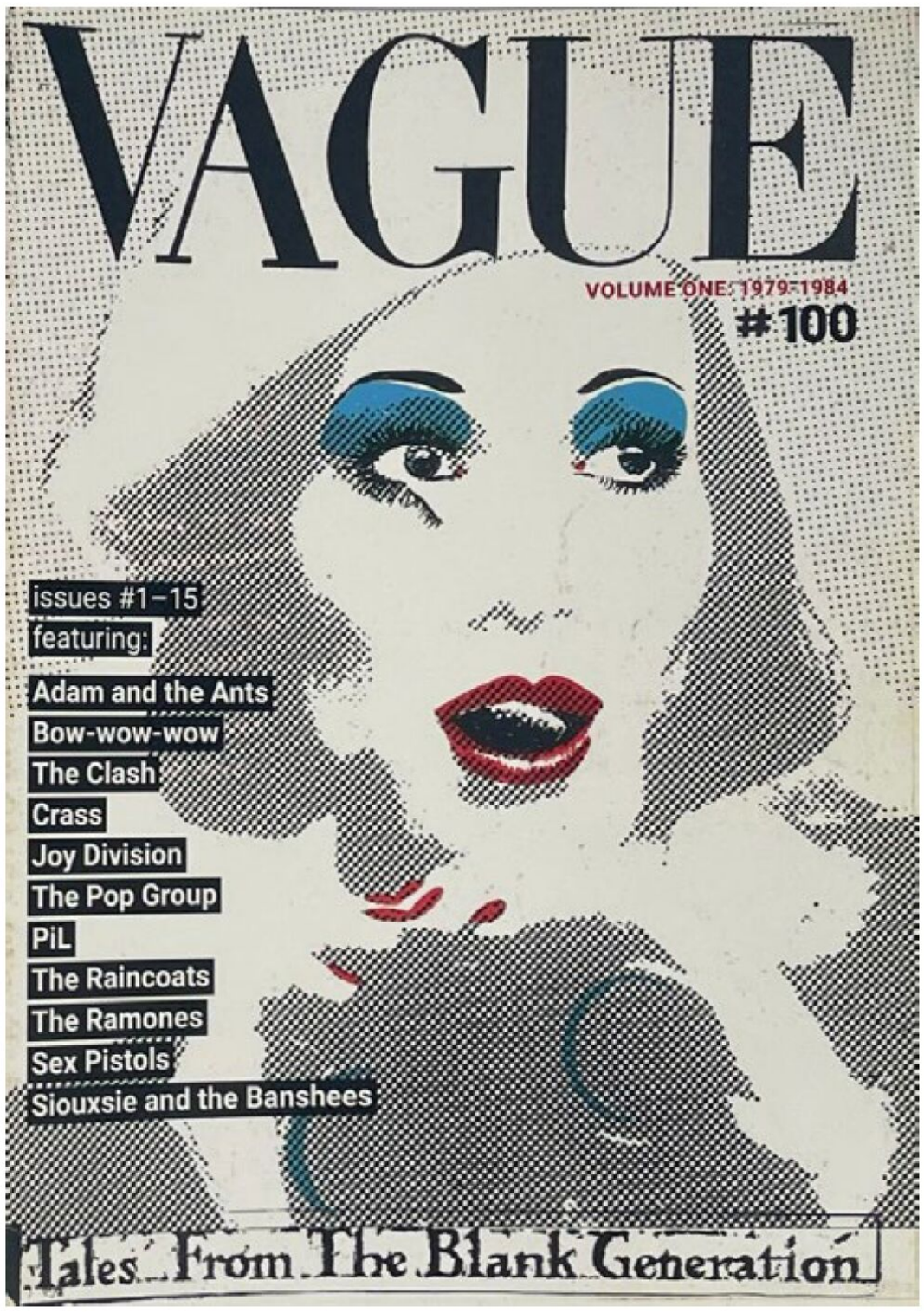
I do apologise. If anything, that made everything utterly confusing. I've clearly demonstrated there's nothing that a guest rap can't improve. I'd like to see the gruff one out of 2 Unlimited lay down some bars over Brian Eno's 'Another Green World'. Or Scatman John popping diddly bops all over '4'33"' by John Cage. Let's not limit it to the rappers. How about Orbital's 'Belfast' with a soupcon of trombone? Oh, yes please. Or Devo's 'Whip It' interrupted by a three-hour tennis match, perhaps? I doff my energy dome to that.

Chuckles D, if you're reading this, please answer my letters. And my DMs. And my semaphore. Yes, that's me outside your place with all the flags. The Oompah Jazz Fusionists need you.

IN VAGUE

Legendary fanzine anthologised

Out now is a full-colour commemorative volume of the first 15 issues of the post-punk fanzine Vague. Lovingly collated by indie publisher PC Press, it's a portrait of 1979-1984, during which time "Vague promoted the notion that a band meant something more than the music and that meaning could be shared among like-minded folk". Featuring The Cure, Bauhaus, The Pop Group and many more, it's a worthy 492-page addition to this month's reading list. **pc-press.co.uk**



RIP IT UP AND START AGAIN

Californian label marks anniversary

Founded in 2011, Time Released Sound have since carved out a niche as one of the most imaginative indies when it comes to design. The label focus on creating one-off packages using recycled materials – from photographs to music boxes – to partner with every release. If you're late to the party, fear not. They've just published a large-format art book so you can peruse their entire back catalogue in one neat coffee-table magnet.

"I had been thinking of doing this for years," says founder Colin Herrick. "But it wasn't until we reached our 100th release that I realised we had a body of work comprehensive enough to be deserving of the treatment we have given it here. It has been a very complex, self-produced labour of love over two years-plus, but I am thankful we invested in professionally re-photographing each piece, and in all the time spent with our wonderful book designer, John Hubbard." Order your copy now for £106. **timereleasedsound.com**

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- *Electronic Sound*

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PULSE

MOONPOOLS

Five-piece serve shimmering shoegaze

WHO?

Basel might seem an unlikely place to spawn a band with such a distinctly British sound as shoegazers Moonpools. But the driving force behind this compelling five-piece – siblings Marcie and Jasper Nyffeler – have ties with Durham, and are as familiar with England’s North-East as they are with the Swiss city’s picturesque medieval surroundings. Aided by synth whizz Francesco Vona, guitarist Matthias Gusset and bass player David Blum, they channel the dense, kaleidoscopic sound of their 90s heroes My Bloody Valentine, Cocteau Twins and Slowdive.

WHY MOONPOOLS?

Because their euphoric and optimistic interpretation of 90s shoegaze is so damn refreshing, and inflected with just the right balance of alt-pop sheen and nostalgic allure. Guitarist Matthias even says that Kevin Shields’ glide guitar technique helped him to find a defining character for their new material, with infectious new single ‘Never Mind’ shot through with the kind of elusive cross-generation appeal that often leads to big things.

TELL US MORE...

The thing that really swings it for Moonpools though, is the undeniable beauty in Marcie’s pure, expressive voice. Some readers might be reminded of the crystal tones of Harriet Wheeler, who fronted late-80s indie darlings The Sundays. Combined with the swirling guitars and surging synths of ‘See Through’ from their current EP ‘Hide And Seek’, it colours the spirit of MBV or Ride with a dollop of pure, melodic sunshine. “This EP really feels like we’re honing our sound,” adds Marcie. “Taking parts of different genres we like and combining them to see what they sound like. I’m excited to see what happens next.” We are too, Marcie.

CARL GRIFFIN

‘Hide And Seek’ is out now on Young And Aspiring

THE FINER THINGS

Premium wooden cans from Japan

Audio-Technica have a stellar track record when it comes to supplying affordable audio gear. But their new ATH-AWKG headphones are a cut above. Handcrafted in Tokyo, they're made from kurogaki, a kind of ancient wood that exhibits beautiful black internal streaks, with a lacquer finish that's supposed to further enhance the wood's grain. Couple that with 53mm driver units, a specially angled magnesium alloy headphone arm, and a double air-damping system which divides the housing structure into two separate acoustic chambers, and you've bagged yourself a serious bit of kit. With limited units available, a pair will set you back a cool £3,000.
audio-technica.com

SOUTH OF NOWHERE

Latin American electronic pioneers paid dues

The history of electronic music is too often seen through a Western prism that begins and ends with the same European artists. So Luis Alvarado, head of Peruvian label Buh Records, and compatriot composer Alejandra Cárdenas (aka Ale Hop), have brought out a brilliant new book called 'Switched On: The Dawn Of Electronic Sound By Latin American Women'.

This essential guide to the origins of electronic music in South America throws up fascinating chapters on electroacoustic pioneers like Columbian Jacqueline Nova, who developed a hybrid sound of indigenous music and electronics at the Electronic Music Laboratory of Centro Latinoamericano de Altos Estudios Musicales (CLAEM). And that's just for starters. In addition, Brazilian voice artist Marcela Lucatelli interviews the eminent composer Jocy De Oliveira, and Venezuelan poet and scholar Natasha Tiniacos speaks to the more recently discovered Venezuelan musician Oksana Linde. Order a copy now for £24. **contingentsounds.com**

NEOLITHIC CANNIBALS

Soundscapes from 10,000 years ago

Forming part of the 2024 Brighton Festival, 'Neolithic Cannibals' is a new exhibition aiming to recreate the neolithic camp discovered in Brighton's Whitehawk Hill area almost a century ago. Curated by local sound artist Simon James – who led a series of workshops with young people in the Whitehawk area to make unique electronic sounds inspired by materials gathered from their local surroundings – it combines archaeology, psychogeography, sound art and activism for a fantastically imaginative experience. Running at the Lighthouse Project community space from 4-19 May, the goal is to encourage deep listening and engender a sense of collective effort to address complex social issues. And on top of all that, entry is free. **lighthouse.org.uk**

PULSE

SWANSITHER

Fear-inducing modular moods

WHO?

Tom Kennedy is both a Shropshire farmer and a modular maestro. 'The Slaughtered Lamb Sessions', his disquieting upcoming album, was recorded over an intense three days in the abandoned cottage used as the location for the terrifying pub in 1981 comedy-horror, 'An American Werewolf In London'. "The mother of my friend Lara bought the cottage in 1978 from a certain Mrs Davies," explains Tom. "Mrs Davies had four consecutive husbands who all died in the room upstairs. There was a nasty vibe in there, and I avoided it. She, and all four husbands, are buried in the graveyard next to the cottage…"

WHY SWANSITHER?

He once made a track about swans. With a zither sound. But hey, back to the scary house… "I couldn't sleep for two nights, thinking about the dead husbands in the next room," continues Tom. "I appeared to be the only living person in the village, and I got into a feedback loop of isolation and writing scary music." Setting up on the kitchen table, he allowed this unsettling seclusion to seep into the sparse modular rhythms on the album. "Eventually the music got so weird that I packed up and went home early. I scared myself with what I was producing."

TELL US MORE...

'The Slaughtered Lamb Sessions' is out now via the Castles In Space Subscription Library, but if you want a taste of Tom's spooky medicine, check out his 'Chance Mechanisms' EP. Mastered by Thomas Ragsdale of Sulk Rooms fame, Tom calls it "weird clock divisions and random stuff", and it will prepare you for that werewolf-ridden cottage. "Those sessions were a live, visceral, unrehearsed reaction to being inside The Slaughtered Lamb," says Tom. "It was a 'Heart Of Darkness' moment for me."

BOB FISCHER

'The Slaughtered Lamb Sessions' is out now via the Castles In Space Subscription Library

DAY TRIPPER

And cover of the month goes to...

Cosmodernism is the pseudonym of Kamil Czapiga, an artist and videographer from Katowice, Poland, who for the past few years has been building an oeuvre comprising resplendent, '2001'-style visuals that lie in the cross-section of chemistry and physics. His working process often involves experimentation with chemical reactions, ink, dyes and "microscopic precision optics".
He recently designed this cover for armchair ravers MOY's 'The Phenomenon Of Memory' album. It may look like it was made using CGI or digital techniques, but this is actually a close-up of a magnetised liquid called ferrofluid. Trippy is the word. You can check out more of his work online, including music videos and a recent collaboration with the European Space Agency on their SWARM project.

instagram.com/cosmodernism

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

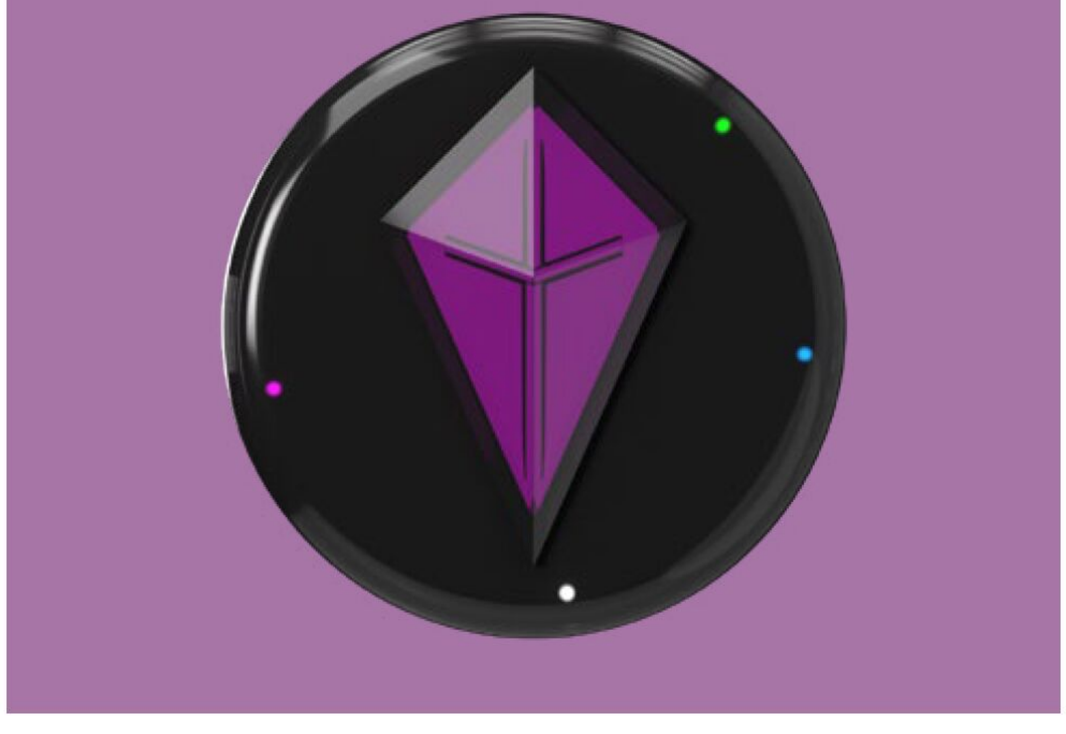
Korg takes on turntables

The much-vaunted 2006 Vestax Handy Trax portable vinyl player is back, courtesy of Korg's new Handytraxx Play, matching the original's retro design with a tranche of added features, like the built-in looper, a "pro-level", and onboard filter and delay for some far-reaching musical concoctions. In case you're wondering what possible use you might have in your life for a portable deck, think about all those moments you've happened on a scratched-up 12-inch at a car boot and desperately wanted to try before you buy. Prices are, as yet, unknown, but sign up to the mailing list to stay informed about the Handytraxx's upcoming release. **korg.co.uk**

MEET ME IN THE MIDDLE

Say goodbye to losing friends

Summer will be here in a flash, and with it comes festival season, so you might want to give Totem Lab's Compass a look-in. This wearable device can pair with four other compasses at once, helping you to stay in touch with your gang while trudging through muddy fields with not even a whiff of mobile signal. That's because it works through satellite navigation (no Bluetooth, phone service, or Wi-Fi required). It's also completely water and dust-proof, and weighs as much as one AA battery (but with a 72-plus hours battery life). Prices range, but you're eyeballing around £50 for one of these. **totemlabs.com**



PULSE

NOT ME BUT US

Post-rock electronica to detonate lugholes

WHO?

Not Me But Us are composer Bruno Bavota and producer Fabrizio Somma. You might know the former for his lockdown-era, ambient-influenced album 'For Apartments: Songs & Loops', while Somma usually trades under the name K-Conjog for some hard-hitting electropop. Despite both having been based in Naples for some time, they only came together in 2019 at the insistence of "a very nice human being and music promoter" called Peppe Guarino, who saw the potential for a collaboration.

WHY NOT ME BUT US?

The duo's music has an underlying insistence, rooted in post-rock grandeur, tasteful elements of modern classical, and injections of ambient and techno. It's music that sounds off-kilter in all the best ways, incubated in a city not often thought about for its cutting-edge sounds ("In Naples, at least 20 years ago, it was difficult to find someone I could talk with about certain records," admits Somma). Tracks on the duo's debut LP 'Two' range in emotion. There's the B Fleischmann-influenced 'Buildings', which conjures up images of summer walks in the city, to the melancholic and monolithic 'Nocturnal Emissions', as well as the album closer 'Us', which starts as an exercise in minimalism before joyfully spiralling out of control.

TELL US MORE...

Bavota and Somma first worked together in earnest at a festival in Procida, an island in the Bay of Naples that was Italy's Capital of Culture for 2022. Here, the duo adopted the moniker Not Me But Us, after a sign caught their attention. Live shows are incoming, and the duo meet regularly at Somma's studio to work on new music. These meetings are also an opportunity to play Mario Kart. "He's still trying to find a way to win a match, at least once," says Bavota.

JONATHAN WRIGHT

'Two' is out now on Sonic Cathedral

CONGRATULATIONS
CHARLES & DIANA

1981

1981...

It was quite a year... Arcades across the UK are packed with kids playing Defender, a new scrolling shooter game from Williams Electronics... Millions gather in their front rooms to watch the Royal Wedding on TV, as street parties take place up and down the country... Large-scale riots break out in inner-city areas such as Brixton in London, Toxteth in Liverpool and Handsworth in Birmingham... The Wigan Casino celebrates its 500th all-nighter and closes its doors just six months later... MTV launches in America with the words “Ladies and gentlemen, rock and roll”, followed by the video for Buggles’ ‘Video Killed The Radio Star’... Roland Corporation in Japan introduces the Jupiter-8 and the TB-303 Bassline, while other new synths include the Korg Polysix... Tottenham Hotspur win the FA Cup, John McEnroe wins Wimbledon, and the first London Marathon attracts around 7,500 runners...

There were some brilliant singles and brilliant albums too. We’ve picked out the best of them – **101 RECORDS OF 1981** (well, records and tapes) – to celebrate this heady and tumultuous year. Have you all got something fizzy in your plastic glasses? Excellent. Let’s get zapping!

WORDS: IMOGEN BEBB, VELIMIR ILIC, PUSH, MARK ROLAND

Williams
DEFENDER
1981
Mk II

January

VISAGE crack the UK charts with 'Fade To Grey', their ethereal new single. It was released before Christmas, but it won't reach its peak position of Number Eight until February. The line-up of the band revolves around a number of prominent figures from London's new romantic hub the Blitz Club, including Steve Strange, Rusty Egan, Midge Ure and Billy Currie, as well as several members of trailblazing post-punk outfit Magazine.

Fans are still deeply divided over **THE CLASH**'s 'Sandinista' album, but the second single from the genre-busting triple set is a mighty wriggly earworm. A duet between Mick Jones and his girlfriend Ellen Foley, 'Hitsville UK' celebrates the mushrooming British DIY music scene, namechecking labels like Rough Trade, Factory, Fast Product, Lightning and Small Wonder. It's a cool first birthday song for the UK independent chart, which launched a year ago this month.

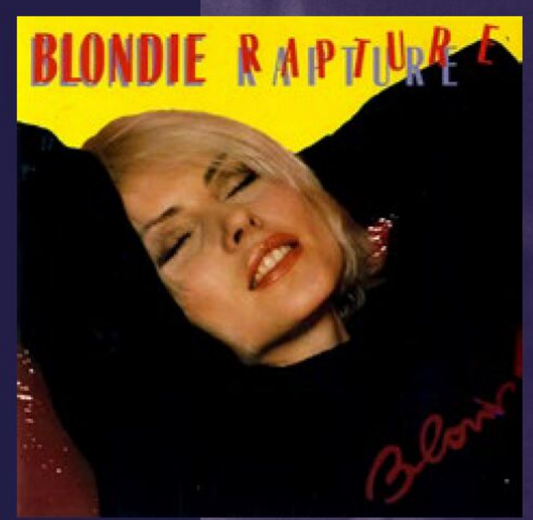
DJing on Monday nights at London's Chelsea Drugstore, Stevo Pearce plays "the weirdest sounds ever heard this side of Venus", a futurist ethos echoed by the **'SOME BIZZARE ALBUM'** sampler on his fledgling label of the same name. It features tracks by unsigned synth artists, many of which seem destined for bigger things. **DEPECHE MODE**'s 'Photographic' and **SOFT CELL**'s 'The Girl With The Patent Leather Face' are on there, alongside cuts by **BLANCMANGE**, **THE THE**, **B-MOVIE** and **NEU ELECTRIKK**.

New York new wave band **TALKING HEADS** find themselves with a much larger audience and it's all down to 'Once In A Lifetime', a naggingly catchy single with a video of David Byrne jerking around like a sweaty preacher. Taken from 'Remain In Light', which came out at the end of last year and is their third album to be produced by Brian Eno, it strikes a nerve and marks their ascent into mainstream consciousness.

Staying in NYC for a while, **BLONDIE**'s 'Rapture' single is a fusion of new wave, Chic-inspired disco and hip hop, with graffiti artist Fab 5 Freddy immortalised in Debbie Harry's extended rap coda – "Fab 5 Freddy told me everybody's fly". A key player on the city's downtown cultural and creative scene, Freddy is part of Brooklyn's infamous Fabulous 5 street art collective, best-known for painting the sides of the Big Apple's subway cars.

Britfunk is one of the major stories of 1981 and **FREEEZ**, a London outfit steered by John Rocca, are among the prime movers. With guest vocals from Ingrid Mansfield Allman, who's also been working with Ian Dury and Chas Jankel, the bright and breezy 'Southern Freeez' is the band's debut single for Beggars Banquet. Thanks in part to their impressive 'Top Of The Pops' slot, complete with two very enthusiastic synth players, it's a UK Top 10 hit too.

The NME has produced an 81-minute cassette in association with Rough Trade. Compiled by the legendary NME writer Roy Carr, it's called **'C81'** and it's yours for two coupons from the weekly music paper, plus a cheque or a postal order for £1.50. There are 25 tracks and the contributors include **CABARET VOLTAIRE**, **SCRITTI POLITTI**, **VIRGIN PRUNES**, **WAH! HEAT**, **ROBERT WYATT**, **PERE UBU**, **THE SPECIALS**, **LINX**, **ORANGE JUICE**, **ESSENTIAL LOGIC**, **JAMES "BLOOD" ULMER**, **BLUE ORCHIDS** and **FURIOUS PIG**.



1981

February

Not content with shaping Talking Heads into one of the best bands on the planet, **BRIAN ENO** and **DAVID BYRNE** have used some of their downtime between making 'Fear Of Music' and 'Remain In Light' to knock out 'My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts', an innovative album of sample-driven grooves. Eno calls it "a vision of a psychedelic Africa" in an interview with Sandy Robertson in Sounds. The rest of us have had a glimpse of the future.

The jewel in the crown of Midge Ure's version of **ULTRAVOX**, the achingly dramatic 'Vienna' peaks at Number Two in the UK singles chart and stays there for four weeks. It's kept off the top spot first by the posthumous John Lennon hit 'Woman', then by Joe Dolce's notorious novelty record 'Shaddap You Face'. Perhaps the British public are punishing Ure for acting under false pretences. He wrote the song's lyrics without ever having been to the Austrian capital.

Mute Records boss Daniel Miller has high hopes for Basildon teenypoppers **DEPECHE MODE**. As well he might. The band's debut single, 'Dreaming Of Me', follows soon after their appearance on 'Some Bizzare Album' and steadily climbs the UK independent chart. It only stops when it reaches Number One. Three months on, 'New Life' gives them a second Number One. Three more months on, 'Just Can't Get Enough' gives them a third.

Theatrical new wave band **TOYAH** are indie chart regulars, but their 'Four From Toyah' EP propels them into the mainstream UK Top Five on the back of its lead track, 'It's A Mystery'. The group is fronted by the endlessly effervescent Toyah Willcox, who is also a seasoned actor. She made her screen debut in Derek Jarman's cult punk film 'Jubilee' in 1978 before playing Monkey in the angsty drama 'Quadrophenia' the following year.

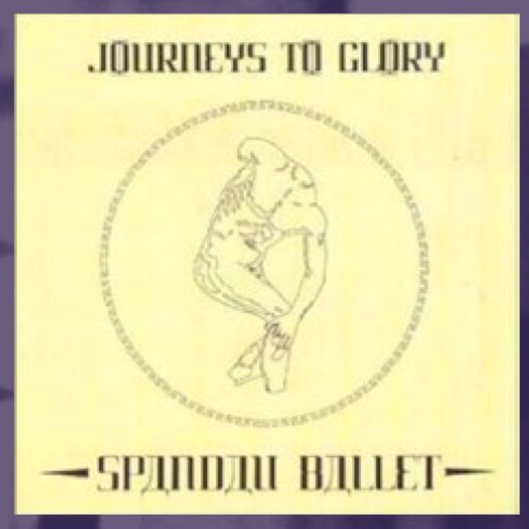
CLOCK DVA have signed to Fetish Records for 'Thirst', their second album. There's been lots of interest in the Sheffield outfit since they played the Futurama Festival six months ago, and the intense tangle of post-punk, avant-jazz and fucko-dub doesn't disappoint. The highlight is '4 Hours', with vocalist Adi Newton in truly sinister form. Tragedy will strike the band later in 1981, though, with the death of bassist Steven "Judd" Turner at the age of 24 as a result of a drug overdose.

The first album on Adrian Sherwood's On-U Sound label is a self-titled tour de force from post-punk/reggae collective **NEW AGE STEPPERS**. It features a host of underground scenesters, including Ari Up and Viv Albertine (The Slits), Mark Stewart and Bruce Smith (The Pop Group) and Victoria Aspinall (The Raincoats), plus Sherwood himself, an ardent sonic adventurer who fearlessly conjures far-out electronic and atmospheric transmissions from his mixing desk.

London synthpoppers **LANDSCAPE** are attracting attention with 'Einstein A Go-Go'. The single is a zany critique of religious fundamentalism and the video looks like it was shot on the set of 'Carry On Screaming'. The group's frontman, Richard James Burgess, is a Blitz Club regular and he will soon become a well-known producer for the likes of Spandau Ballet, Adam Ant and Kim Wilde.

Guildford toughs **THE STRANGLERS** are already on their fifth album and a sixth is in the pipeline for later in the year. They've planted electronic sounds and sci-fi strangeness into their punk fanbase's brains with 'The Gospel According To The Meninblack' and the result is an incomparable masterpiece of post-punk experimentalism. The band's lairy misanthropy has fully evolved into something bordering on genius.

March



'Ceremony' is the debut release from **NEW ORDER**. It's on Factory (of course) and it's produced by Martin Hannett (of course). It's one of the last songs written by Joy Division and was recorded by the band a few days before frontman Ian Curtis died. A totally new version has been crafted by the remaining members, with Bernard Sumner singing Curtis' lyrics, and the result is stunning. It's going to take something incredibly special for 'Ceremony' not to be the best single of 1981.

If The Clash had written 'Hitsville UK' this year rather than last, they'd have mentioned Alan Horne's Glasgow indie Postcard Records in their list of labels. The self-styled "Sound Of Young Scotland", Postcard have put out a new **ORANGE JUICE** single, the charming 'Poor Old Soul', and it's their sweetest yet. Frontman Edwyn Collins – "His tongue tucked firmly in his cheek", to quote his lyrics here – is inspiring an entire generation of jangly pop bards and is surely well on his way to superstardom.

The Britfunk hits keep coming. With the title track riding high in the UK singles chart, **LINX** deliver their 'Intuition' album and the group based around vocalist David Grant and bassist Peter "Sketch" Martin have packed it with groovy goodness. The standout is 'Don't Get In My Way', a muscular synthfunk tune with an important sociopolitical message – "You swore I'd be your equal / But still your prejudice remains the same" – which can also be heard on the NME's 'C81' tape.

Human League breakaways Martyn Ware and Ian Craig Marsh release a cassette album under the name **BRITISH ELECTRIC FOUNDATION**. 'Music For Stowaways' is inspired by the Sony Stowaway, a new portable tape player which has just been launched in the UK, and the music is designed to provide listeners with a soundtrack to their everyday lives. Sony change the name of the tape player to the Walkman soon after.

American singer **KIM CARNES** scores a massive global hit with 'Bette Davis Eyes', a song written by Donna Weiss and Jackie DeShannon. It was first recorded as a country-tinged blues track by DeShannon in 1974. Carnes' mellower and sultry synth-based single climbs to Number One in 21 countries and tops the US chart for nine weeks, making it Billboard's biggest record of the year.

Another band to emerge from the Blitz Club are **SPANDAU BALLET**. Their much-anticipated debut album is 'Journeys To Glory', which will remain in the UK charts for a total of 29 weeks. The songs are all written by guitarist and synthesist Gary Kemp, and he makes no secret of the fact he's heavily influenced by David Bowie and European dance music. That's particularly palpable in 'To Cut A Long Story Short', the synth-heavy and shiny lead single.

Having recorded one of the very first gothic rock albums with last year's 'In The Flat Field', **BAUHAUS** are broadening their horizons on their latest single. It's called 'Kick In The Eye' and it's a sinewy and snaky funk-oriented track, with bassist David J front and centre throughout. It sees them move from 4AD to Beggars Banquet, who are also gearing up to release the band's 'Mask' LP in the autumn.

The awesome Japanese electronic music factory known as **YELLOW MAGIC ORCHESTRA** are riding a crest with 'BGM', their fourth album. Playing their home advantage, it's the first record made with a Roland TR-808 drum machine. The LP also features a Roland MC-4 Microcomputer. With these futurist devices, YMO draw upon pop, the avant-garde and the emerging US rap scene to create gleaming hymns of modernity so sharp and perfect it's a technological wonder in itself.

April

PUBLIC IMAGE LTD appear on 'Top Of The Pops' miming to 'The Flowers Of Romance', a thrillingly tuneless drone set to thundering drums and the title track of their uncompromising new album. A few weeks on, the band play at The Ritz in New York, improvising behind a screen with a 60-year-old blues drummer they'd only met a couple of days earlier. The ensuing riot is far less surprising than the 'TOTP' performance, but both keep PiL at the centre of the action.

The latest from **THE FALL** is 'Slates', a six-track, 23-minute, 10-inch EP. "Slates drive me bats," yells Mark E Smith in the opening rant of the scorching 'Slates, Slags, Etc'. When the band play the track live, Smith starts inserting the names of some of the artists on the NME 'C81' tape into the lyrics, together with the line "cut out your coupons". Whatever he's saying here, he's probably not being complimentary.

One part weird to two parts groovy, 'The Electric Spanking Of War Babies' is George Clinton's final **FUNKADELIC** studio album. The title is a reference to the Vietnam War and American imperialism. Warner Brothers reject the original sleeve art, which features a phallic spaceship and a naked woman, but Clinton gets the last laugh with a green cartoon splash over pretty much everything, declaring, "OH LOOK! The cover that 'They' were TOO SCARED to print!".

The rather gloomy but rather brilliant 'Faith' is **THE CURE**'s third album. Robert Smith prefers keyboards to his guitar on many of the tracks, with Simon Gallup's six-string bass taking the lead on the likes of 'The Holy Hour' and 'All Cats Are Grey'. They promote the record with a UK tour and, rather than a band, they're supported by 'Carnage Visors', a surreal animated short film made by Ric Gallup, the bassist's brother.

Soulful funk trio **IMAGINATION** release their slinky debut single 'Body Talk', which climbs into the UK Top Five. The track is penned by two members of the band, Leee John and Ashley Ingram, together with the production duo Steve Jolley and Tony Swain, who go on to write and produce material for pop acts including Spandau Ballet and Alison Moyet. Imagination's debut album, also called 'Body Talk', follows in October.

One of the most sought-after import records is 'Schwarze Welt', a three-track seven-inch by Hamburg's all-female **XMAL DEUTSCHLAND** on the ZickZack label. With synths, distorted guitars, drum machines and couldn't-give-a-fuck German vocals, it's a spirited burst of electronic gothic punk. The band's fabulous sprayed-up hair, pictured on the cover of the record, inspires a thousand Camden lookalikes and leads to a decade of ozone depletion.

What's that noise? It is, of course, the loud buzz about **THE BIRTHDAY PARTY**'s 'Prayers On Fire' album, which 4AD have licensed from Missing Link Records in Australia. Apart from the soul-shuddering songs – 'Zoo-Music Girl', 'King Ink', 'Cry' – the band give great interviews. "When the history of rock music is written – which, since it's practically dead, will be soon – it'll just be remembered as a sordid interruption of normality," Nick Cave tells NME's Barney Hoskyns.

Pitching up somewhere between Magazine and The Drummers Of Burundi, another 4AD release is **MODERN ENGLISH**'s 'Mesh & Lace' LP. The Colchester post-punks have been with the label for around a year and still have a way to go to fulfil their potential, but the signs are good. More like the ever-expanding 'A Viable Commercial', easily the best track here, and last year's 'Swans On Glass' single please.

May

KRAFTWERK break their three-year silence since 'The Man-Machine' with an album about how computers are going to take over the world. Ha! Fat chance! 'Computer World' is a sonic high-water mark for the Düsseldorf foursome and, as it turns out, a scarily accurate socio-technological statement of fact. The band are heading out on the road to promote the record, playing around 80 dates across the globe, 18 of them in the UK.

DEUTSCH AMERIKANISCHE FREUNDSCHAFT, Kraftwerk's unruly fellow Düsseldorfers, topless and glistening with sweat, blow the joint open with their 'Alles Ist Gut' album. Especially the monstrous synthpunk track 'Der Mussolini'. Electronic music's reputation as either cold and emotionless or insubstantial pop fluff doesn't stand a chance in the face of DAF's erect sex music. Both 'Alles Ist Gut' and 'Gold Und Liebe', their second LP of 1981, are overseen by German production king Conny Plank.

The arresting cover of 'Nightclubbing' depicts an androgynous **GRACE JONES** sporting indigo skin, a distinctive flat-top haircut and a man's Armani suit. The record inside is slick and exotic, fusing elements of reggae, dub, funk and disco, and is later voted Album Of The Year by NME writers. Six singles are lifted from 'Nightclubbing', most notably 'Pull Up To The Bumper', 'Feel Up' and the Sting composition 'Demolition Man'.

Depending on whether or not you count their 'The Graveyard And The Ballroom' tape, 'To Each…' is the first or second album by alt-funk pioneers and Manchester icons **A CERTAIN RATIO**. It was recorded in New York but it's still a very British post-punk record, with a dark vibe and a rough edge to much of it. Wild horn blasts, mad bass runs, long stretches of feedback and endlessly clattering drums… what's not to like?

ECHO & THE BUNNYMEN release 'Heaven Up Here' as the follow-up to 'Crocodiles'. The word "here" is an important indication of where the Liverpool group are at. The LP is applauded by the music papers, with many writers praising its ambiguous lyrics and gloomy overtones. "The thing is, I don't know whether ambiguity is 'in' these days," rebuts singer Ian McCulloch. "Everything I do is ambiguous, but people just seem to think that means you're on drugs."

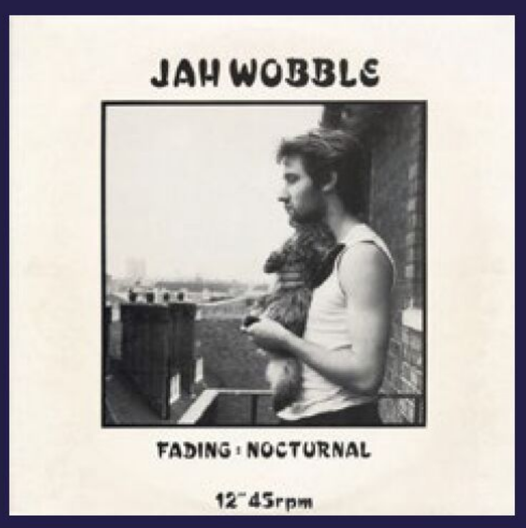
How come it has taken three years for **AU PAIRS** to get an album out? The Birmingham band are fronted by Lesley Woods and the literate, political, female-focused lyrics of 'Playing With A Different Sex' are powered by stark, angular, punk-funk stylings. They're high up the list for anyone putting on a benefit gig, especially after playing their protest song 'Armagh' on a live transmission of 'The Old Grey Whistle Test', despite specifically being told not to.

Edinburgh outfit **FIRE ENGINES** have rejected an offer from Postcard in favour of Pop Aural, a label set up by Fast Product man Bob Last. They put out an album in January, 'Lubricate Your Living Room', and now there's 'Candyskin', a single that's simultaneously swinging and spiky. They're one of the hippest bands in the land – helped along by their cover of Heaven 17's 'Fascist Groove Thang' for a John Peel session – but they'll be gone by the end of the year.

The follow-up to his mega-selling 'Oxygène' and 'Équinoxe' albums (1976 and 1978), 'Les Chants Magnétiques' finds **JEAN-MICHEL JARRE** very much in thrall to the digital synth and sampling tech of the new Fairlight CMI. It's the first foreign music to be broadcast on Chinese radio for many decades. Later in the year, Jarre also becomes the first Western musician to perform in post-Mao Zedong China.

Inspired by James Brown's similarly titled 1965 classic and issued on Dick O'Dell's Y Records, the instrumental 'Papa's Got A Brand New Pigbag' is the work of Cheltenham outfit **PIGBAG**. All grin-inducing art-funk/jazz/ska effervescence, infectious trumpet parps and squawking sax riffs, Smash Hits' Steve Bush describes the single as "music for a wildlife safari, with tribal drums and frantic horns… you can almost hear the rampaging tapirs".

June



'Juju' is the latest album by **SIOUXSIE AND THE BANSHEES** and it's their best since their first. "Intriguing, intense, brooding and powerfully atmospheric," declares Betty Page in Sounds. John McGeoch has added a different dimension to the group since joining from Magazine and is in fantastic form, especially on 'Spellbound' and 'Monitor'. There's a tribal feel throughout too, giving a strong hint of what's to come from Siouxsie and Budgie's offshoot project The Creatures later in the year.

It's been six months since **THROBBING GRISTLE** recorded their improvised piece 'Discipline' at live concerts in Berlin and Manchester. The two versions are issued on a 12-inch, but within days the group have collapsed, announcing that "the mission is terminated" in a postcard sent to their fans on 23 June. TG will continue to cast a long shadow over electronic music as taboo-busting transgressives and progenitors of the burgeoning industrial scene for many years to come.

It's several months since he left PiL and bass colossus **JAH WOBBLE** is keeping himself busy. As well as working with Can men Holger Czukay and Jaki Liebezeit, he has expanded his solo catalogue with a 12-inch on his own Lago label. 'Fading' and 'Nocturnal', the former in vocal and instrumental versions, are textural dubscapes teeming with odd noises – fizzing, creaking, rattling – and it's fascinating and fiendish stuff.

And so to New York, where Michael Zilkha and Michel Esteban have been running ZE Records since 1978. John Peel tells Melody Maker it's "the best independent label in the world". Their latest offering is the **'MUTANT DISCO'** compilation, which includes **KID CREOLE & THE COCONUTS**, **COATI MUNDI**, **MATERIAL** and **WAS (NOT WAS)**. The collection is subtitled 'A Subtle Dislocation Of The Norm', although "subtle" is the wrong word. Woodwork squeaks and out come the freaks!

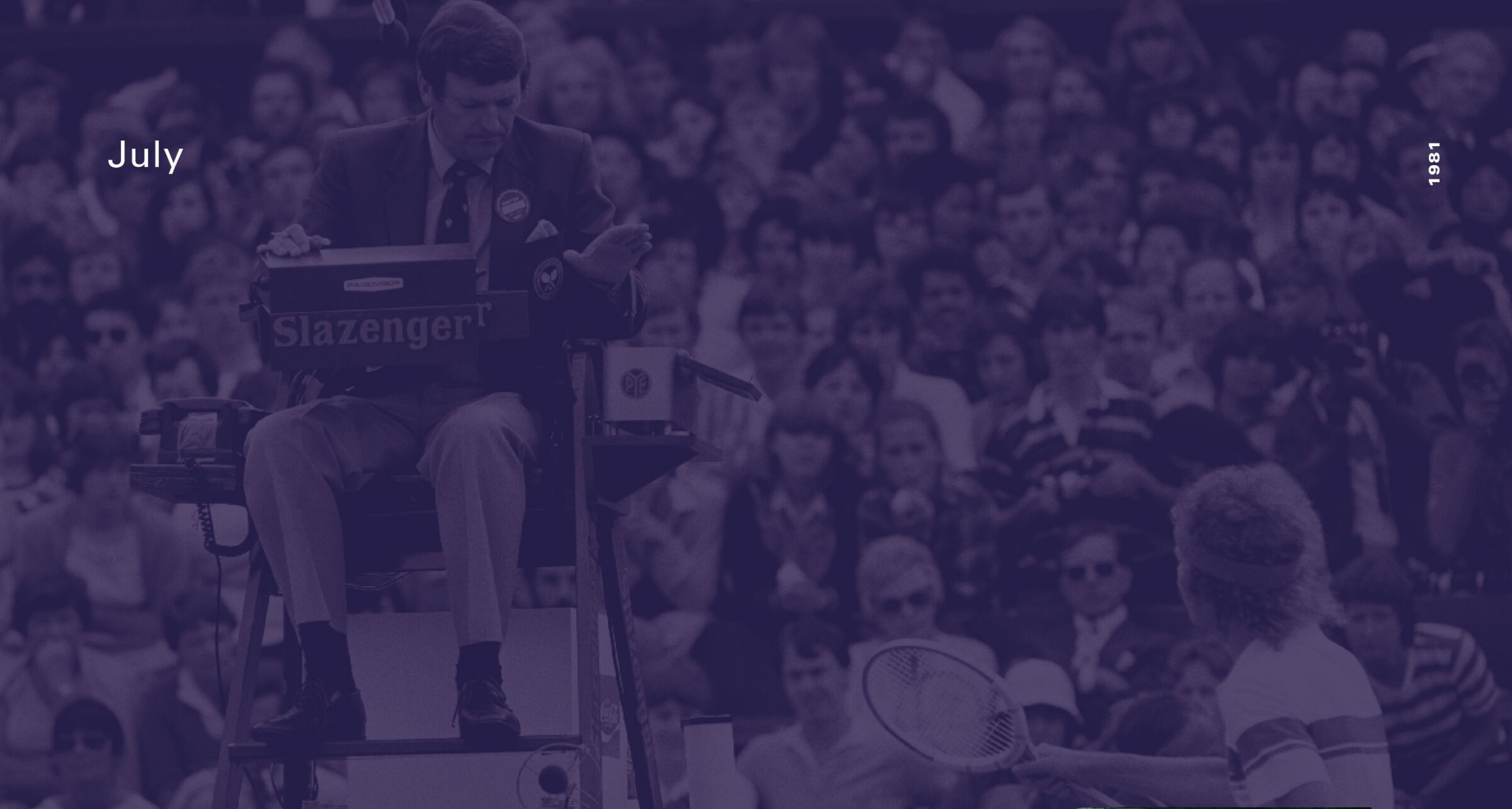
Another hot New York label is 99. Ed Bahlman only started the imprint a year ago, but already it's given us the likes of The Bush Tetras, ESG and Liquid Liquid. Next up is 'Dirty Washing', a three-track 12-inch by Flying Lizards singer and Sounds journalist **VIVIEN GOLDMAN**. The lead cut is the wry and sinuous 'Launderette', which Goldman recorded when John Lydon sneaked her into Virgin's Manor Studios during PiL's 'Flowers Of Romance' sessions.

One of the artists Vivien Goldman has championed in Sounds are **THE RAINCOATS**. The London band have just released 'Odyshape' as the follow-up to their 1979 self-titled debut and it's an eclectic swirl of sounds, incorporating dub, folk and jazz into their post-punk mix. They've scoured the junk shops for some of the exotic instruments they use on the record, such as the balophone, the shruti box and the kalimba.

Fronted by Ted Milton, the nearest we've ever got to a British Captain Beefheart, **BLURT** have been playing a few gigs with The Fall to promote their new single. 'The Fish Needs A Bike' is a wild avant-jazz stomp and it's backed by the equally frantic and strange 'This Is My Royal Wedding Souvenir'. But however odd Milton might seem, you do need to take him seriously. "I look a bit anomalous, out of place, but I'm not a comedian," he tells the NME's Chris Bohn.

KILLING JOKE are back with their second album, 'What's THIS For...!', and it's all quite probably even murkier and more terrifying than last year's eponymous debut. In his Melody Maker review, Adam Sweeting calls it "abattoir disco". The one single from the LP, 'Follow The Leaders', proves to be prophetic in early 1982, when frontman Jaz Coleman scarpers to Iceland, muttering about his fears of an imminent apocalypse. He takes guitarist Geordie Walker with him but triggers the departure of bassist Youth soon after.

July



Some Bizzare release **SOFT CELL**'s idiosyncratic take on 'Tainted Love', the northern soul staple originally recorded by Gloria Jones in 1964. The 12-inch version cleverly segues into a cover of The Supremes' 'Where Did Our Love Go' for the second half of the disc. It takes a few weeks to get there, but 'Tainted Love' becomes the first 80s synthpop Number One in the UK, selling more than a million copies by the end of the year.

'The Friends Of Mr Cairo' is the second album from **JON & VANGELIS**, aka former Yes frontman Jon Anderson and Greek synth maestro Evangelos Odysseas Papathanassiou. It's an engaging electronic odyssey and the title track is a tribute to Hollywood's 1940s golden age, featuring impressions of iconic actors such as Humphrey Bogart and Peter Lorre. Enormo-hit 'I'll Find My Way Home', which is released in November, is added to later editions.

JOHN CARPENTER's brooding score for 'Escape From New York' serves as the backdrop to his dystopian movie of the same name, co-written and co-directed by the man himself. Working with sidekick and technical whizz Alan Howarth, the duo employ a wealth of cutting-edge gear – Prophet-5 and ARP synths, plus a Linn LM-1 drum machine – to achieve a future-facing and minimal analogue sound.

There's a lot of excitement about **JOSEF K**'s 'The Only Fun In Town'. It's the first album released on Postcard Records and there's a tremendous sense of urgency about it. The guitars are prickly, the drums are frantic, and the whole thing is over in half an hour. But as well as being Postcard's first long-player, it's also their last. Josef K split up a few weeks later and the label shuts up shop not long after that.

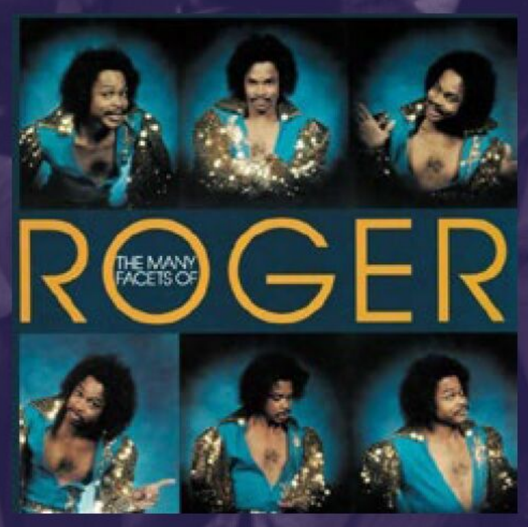
Pete Wylie has dropped the "Heat" off the end of his band's name and added a couple of synths to his armoury. But while the first **WAH!** album isn't what the critics are expecting, that's all to the good. 'Nah=Poo – The Art Of Bluff' is positively symphonic in places, sending Wylie's coruscating bursts of guitar and Carl Washington's chunky bass sprints into another dimension. Upwards! Onwards! Wahtronics!

It's not just "the quiz of the week" that's from Norwich. **THE HIGSONS** are students at the University of East Anglia and frontman Charlie "Switch" Higson has stolen a metal bin from his halls of residence which he batters with a drumstick at their gigs. 'I Don't Want To Live With Monkeys' is their first release and it's two minutes of rowdy and twisted punk-funk. Altogether now, "Hoo-ha-be-debby-debby-debby / Hoo-ha-be-dup-dup-doh…"

Another debut single and another punk-funk gem is **MAXIMUM JOY**'s 'Stretch' on Y Records. Influenced by jazz, reggae and disco, the Bristol band is fronted by Janine Rainforth and includes former members of Glaxo Babies and The Pop Group. Resounding with rasping sax and slap-bass, with Rainforth's vocals repeatedly spiralling into screams, it's licensed to 99 in the US and is an underground hit on the dancefloors of NYC.

Transcending music tribalism, **THE SPECIALS**' eerie and visceral 'Ghost Town' is a major piece of social commentary that ensnares all and sundry to its cause. Alluding to unemployment, urban decay and inner-city unrest ("No job to be found in this country / Can't go on no more / People getting angry"), this work of genius spends three weeks at the top of the UK chart. It's also voted Single Of The Year by NME. And Melody Maker. And Sounds.

August



The video for **DURAN DURAN**'s 'Girls On Film' single is immensely popular on MTV, the brand-new music television channel that launches this month. Directed by Kevin Godley and Lol Creme, it's controversial stuff. Even the censored version is pretty racy. The heavily made-up band perform the track alongside scantily dressed models, who are seen battling with sumo wrestlers, doling out deadly massages, and hitching piggyback rides from men dressed as horses. Ooh-er.

Having announced he was retiring from live work earlier in the year, **GARY NUMAN** releases 'She's Got Claws' off the back of a series of farewell gigs at Wembley Arena. The single marks a departure from his dystopian electronic sound, featuring a prominent saxophone solo and funky fretless bass pulls courtesy of Japan's Mick Karn. It's another hit for Numan and it's a safe bet that he'll be back touring again soon.

After some lucrative recording sessions earlier in the year, **SIMPLE MINDS** bring out two albums at the same time. Produced by Steve Hillage, 'Sons And Fascination' and 'Sister Feelings Call' are first marketed as a double set and then as two separate discs. The group headline the last night of the Futurama Festival at Stafford Bingley Hall a few weeks later, with frontman Jim Kerr struggling through the set despite suffering from a nasty bout of food poisoning.

Indie favourites **ALTERED IMAGES** dip their toes into poppier waters with their peppy and fanciful 'Happy Birthday' single. It's the title cut of their debut album and the only track not produced by Siouxsie And The Banshees bassist Steven Severin. The man at the helm is Martin Rushent, who the band approached after hearing good things about the work that he's been doing at his state-of-the-art Genetic Studios in Berkshire.

Hans-Joachim Roedelius and Dieter Moebius team up again for **CLUSTER**'s last release on Sky Records. As the analogue era draws to a close, with digital synths and MIDI around the corner, 'Curiosum' is the final word from the originators of understated electronic experimentation. Warm, bouncy and inventive, it carries the spirit of the 1970s German underground and bestows another difficult-to-find goldmine for synth enthusiasts to discover in the import bins.

After dabbling in jazz fusion and electro during the 1970s, American pianist **HERBIE HANCOCK** delivers his 32nd LP. 'Magic Windows' is a funky six-tracker which further widens his creative palette and embraces modern tech by the bucket-load, deploying a staggering array of synthesisers in the process – most of them played by Hancock himself. Sylvester, Ray Parker Jr, Adrian Belew and Sheila E also guest, adding their singular vibes and chops to the mix.

ROGER TROUTMAN unveils 'The Many Facets Of Roger', a solo album with as much bounce to the ounce as you'd expect from the skipper of Ohio electro-funk giants Zapp. Troutman puts his trusty Electro-Harmonix EH-7200 Golden Throat talkbox to good use on several cuts, most notably 'So Ruff, So Tuff' and an 11-minute version of Marvin Gaye's 'I Heard It Through The Grapevine'. It's head-spinning and butt-wobbling stuff from start to finish.

Building on last year's well-received 'Waiting For A Miracle', Sheffield post-punk four-piece **THE COMSAT ANGELS** – named after a short story by JG Ballard – return with the equally acclaimed 'Sleep No More'. "Specially tailored for the early hours, it makes for passionate but uneasy listening," says Mark Ellen in Smash Hits. "Murky bass, drums like rifle shots, a guitar and organ, both on the verge of a nervous breakdown, and a vocal that's gloriously gloomy."

Following 'The Bridge', his 1979 collaboration with Robert Rental, **THOMAS LEER** strikes out on his own with the '4 Movements' EP. His debut for Cherry Red, it's a collision of post-punk, alt-funk and avant-pop, but very much on his own terms. "I could've gone out with synthesisers and robot man suits, but it's all so restrictive," he tells the NME's Paul Morley. "You always have to be ready for what's next."

September

CABARET VOLTAIRE's new album sounds almost radio-friendly for them – and for a record about the rise of religious fundamentalism. 'Red Mecca' is still dense, dark and resolutely difficult, but it's perhaps more muscular in its execution. It's the swan song of the original Cabs' line-up of Stephen Mallinder, Richard H Kirk and Chris Watson, with the latter quitting the group for fresh pastures as a sound recordist at Tyne Tees Television.

Martyn Ware and Ian Craig Marsh get together with singer Glenn Gregory for 'Penthouse And Pavement', an album by **HEAVEN 17**. They're an offshoot project of British Electric Foundation. The galvanising lead single '(We Don't Need This) Fascist Groove Thang' is banned by the BBC for referring to US president Ronald Reagan as a "fascist god in motion", but that doesn't stop the LP spending more than a year in the UK charts.

After the austere masterpiece 'Metamatic', **JOHN FOXX**'s 'The Garden' is a more expansive affair. The album features acoustic guitar, piano, bass and drums alongside the electronics, and it's closer to how Ultravox sounded before Foxx abandoned the band in 1979. It even includes the song 'Systems Of Romance', which was written for but not used on the Ultravox LP bearing the same title. A snazzy glossy booklet, 'The Church', featuring Foxx's own photographs, comes with the first pressing.

DEVO's latest album is 'New Traditionalists', a collection of catchy synthpop tunes with a heavy dose of satire. The title comes from badges they saw being worn by salarymen in Japan showing allegiance to a dodgy nationalist organisation, but the band turn the meaning on its head and pack the record with potential hits like 'Through Being Cool' and 'Beautiful World'. Devo fashions for 1981 include the utopian boy scout uniform and the JFK pompadour plastic headgear.

Brixton innovators **THIS HEAT** unleash 'Deceit'. It's the band's second album and an outstanding achievement, but it's also their final statement. Like 'Tago Mago'-era Can transplanted into post-punk with Eno playing around on it – it's actually produced by Flying Lizard David Cunningham – but that description fails to capture the chaotic brilliance of its dramatic textural shifts, tape cut-ups, agitated rhythms and hypnotic chants.

Forget all of that one-two-three-four nonsense. Buzzocks singer **PETE SHELLEY** has been messing about with electronic music for years, so it's no surprise that his debut solo single is an innovative, propulsive, synth-laden track. Another product of Martin Rushent's Genetic Studios, 'Homosapien' is banned by the BBC for its "explicit reference to gay sex" ("Homo superior / In my interior") but still manages to reach a very respectable Number 14 in the UK chart.

New York poet and vocalist **ANNIE ANXIETY** is a recent arrival in the UK. She's over here at the invitation of Crass, performing as a support act to the anarcho-punks using backing tapes, and she's now put out a two-track seven-inch called 'Barbed Wire Halo' on the band's label. Both of the pieces are highly experimental, with Annie talking, whispering, screaming and occasionally singing over cut-up, glitchy, minimalist electronic soundscapes. It's distinctly disturbing and yet strangely intriguing.

Leeds quartet **GIRLS AT OUR BEST!** enter the fray with 'Pleasure', which will turn out to be their one and only album. They're fond of barbed guitars, but they're not afraid to employ pop melodies and even licks of jazz clarinet. The LP is engineered by Mark Ellis, also known as Flood, who goes on to production fame with Depeche Mode and U2, and it also features a young unknown musician by the name of Thomas Dolby on synthesisers.

October

‘The Adventures Of Grandmaster Flash On The Wheels Of Steel’ is a record made from other records. But unlike ‘Stars On 45’, which was put together in a studio, New York hip hop DJ **GRANDMASTER FLASH** has created this seven-minute 12-inch completely live, utilising three decks and a pile of tracks by the likes of Chic, Blondie and Queen, as well as rap acts such as The Sugarhill Gang and Spoonie Gee. It’s an astonishing achievement.

THE SLITS are back. And to make sure everybody knows it, they’ve called their new album ‘Return Of The Giant Slits’. “It’s just a joke,” Viv Albertine tells Kris Needs in an interview with ZigZag. “It’s like an old B-movie.” With UK reggae don Dennis “Blackbeard” Bovell and Y Records boss Dick O’Dell sharing the production credits, it sounds much more relaxed and natural than their debut, but there are plenty of punk stings too. ‘Earthbeat’ and ‘Difficult Fun’ are terrific.

Philip Oakey has a new line-up for **THE HUMAN LEAGUE**, including singers Joanne Catherall and Susanne Sulley, and they’re ready to release their third album. ’Dare’ includes their recent singles, ’The Sound Of The Crowd’ and ’Love Action (I Believe In Love)’, and is produced by the seemingly unstoppable Martin Rushent at Genetic. It’s an instant smash, staying in the UK Top 10 for five months and earning a platinum disc along the way.

Another big album this month is **DEPECHE MODE**’s ‘Speak & Spell’. It’s not quite on the scale of ‘Dare’ but it’s generally well-received – “Generous, silly, susceptible, electro-tickled pop” says Paul Morley in the NME – and it earns them a fourth top spot in the indie charts. All is not well in the camp, though. Vince Clarke, their lead songwriter, quits the band shortly after the record comes out, citing creative differences with the other members.

British underground music fans get a language lesson when **EINSTÜRZENDE NEUBAUTEN** (it means Collapsing New Buildings) arrive with their ‘Kollaps’ LP. It’s been a while since Faust’s pneumatic drill aesthetics and it’s about time for a post-punk take on the German industrial-racket-as-music vibe. Cold War Berlin, already home to a school of electronic music and Bowie’s feted trilogy, claims another place at the high table of pop culture.

‘The “Sweetest Girl”’ represents a style shift from **SCRITTI POLITTI**’s hitherto post-punk leanings. The single sees Green Gartside in excellent form and features Robert Wyatt on keyboards. NME journalist Barney Hoskyns is thoroughly smitten. “Soft, silver sweetness, a gliding seduction and ethereality of drum machine, synths and pianos, bass swinging like a well-oiled hinge, opening and closing in suction, and the lightest, most luscious and lucid voice since Arthur Lee,” he coos.

Linx backing singer **JUNIOR GISCOMBE** is trying to forge a solo career and his new single is ‘Mama Used To Say’, an uplifting and infectious funk track propelled by an unrelenting synth bassline. Sales are initially modest, but that changes when radio stations in America start picking up on the record. By early 1982, it’s a huge hit on both sides of the Atlantic, and Giscombe becomes the first British artist to appear on ‘Soul Train’, the legendary US TV show, since David Bowie in 1975.

Malcolm McLaren prodigies **BOW BOW BOW** are no strangers to controversy. Last year’s ‘C-30 C-60 C-90 Go’ cassette single was condemned for promoting home taping. Now they’ve gone and upset everyone with their first full-length LP, ‘See Jungle! See Jungle! Go Join Your Gang Yeah! City All Over, Go Ape Crazy’, the cover of which features a recreation of Manet’s ‘Le Déjeuner Sur L’Herbe’ painting with the band’s 14-year-old singer Annabella Lwin in the nude.

Melding elements of breezy pop and restless funk, **HAIRCUT 100**’s debut single is ‘Favourite Shirts (Boy Meets Girl)’. It makes the UK Top Five without much trouble, helped by a spirited appearance on ‘Top Of The Pops’. The group’s frontman is Nick Heyward, who used to work as a commercial artist in advertising. If you’re having Ready Brek for your breakfast, take a good look at the box. That’s one of Heyward’s designs.

VIRGIN PRUNES refused to leave the stage after their chaotic set at last month’s Futurama Festival. Now they are embarking on a series of releases called ‘A New Form Of Beauty’ on Rough Trade, the first part of which is a three-track seven-inch leading with the strange and beautiful ‘Sandpaper Lullabye’. A 10-inch follows in a few weeks and then a 12-inch before the end of the year. Fuck dance, let’s art.

November

It's seven months since **THE FALL**'s 'Slates' six-tracker. They've been touring America for a chunk of that time, but Mark E Smith has had to leave behind 17-year-old drummer Paul Hanley because of visa issues, re-recruiting Karl Burns as his replacement. Now they're back in the UK, Hanley and Burns are both on the team, and the band's double drummer era starts with their 'Lie Dream Of A Casino Soul' single, a caustic portrait of the northern soul scene.

With 'Tainted Love' a permanent fixture on record players across the UK, **SOFT CELL** bring out their debut album. 'Non-Stop Erotic Cabaret' is sleazy, infectious and an immediate hit. Vocalist Marc Almond isn't the least bit fazed by the success of the band, though. "If it stops tomorrow, I couldn't give a shit," he tells Jon Savage in an interview with The Face. "I'd still sing. I'd still carry on. Having hit records or being a triple underlined pop star is not the important thing."

With keyboardist Gillian Gilbert's role becoming increasingly significant, **NEW ORDER** are edging towards a more obviously electronic sound. But while there's a clue in the title of their first album, 'Movement' is still very much a band finding their feet. It's also very much a post-punk record. The fans certainly aren't unhappy about that, with sales quickly pushing it up to the top of the indie chart, where it stays for four weeks.

Wirral synthsters **ORCHESTRAL MANOEUVRES IN THE DARK** hit the big time with the release of 'Architecture & Morality', their ethereal and grandiose third album. It sells four million copies worldwide and three singles are extracted – 'Souvenir', 'Joan Of Arc' and 'Maid Of Orleans' – all of which reach the UK Top Five. Frontman Andy McCluskey isn't happy when Virgin Records suggest putting out 'She's Leaving' as a fourth single, though, accusing the label of trying to "prostitute the band's art".

GANG OF FOUR are easily one of the finest live bands in the UK right now and their performance on 'The Old Grey Whistle Test' is stunning. As well as 'He'd Send In The Army' from their recent 'Solid Gold' album, they play a blistering version of their new single, 'To Hell With Poverty'. By the end of it, vocalist Jon King looks completely shellshocked. This is alt-funk as we've never seen or heard it before.

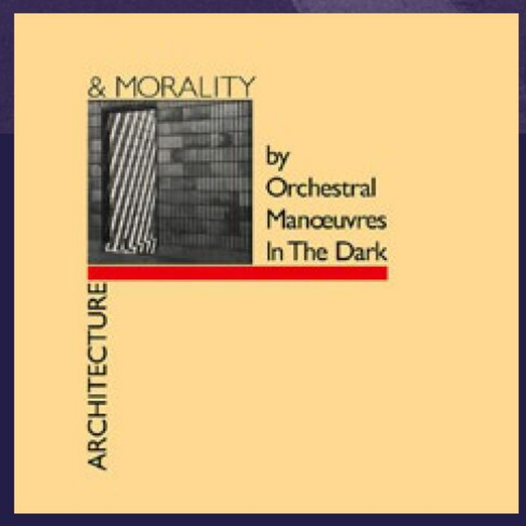
There are rave reviews and strong sales for **JAPAN**'s strikingly minimalistic 'Tin Drum' album. It yields four singles, most notably the glorious 'Ghosts', which becomes their biggest hit. It's also popular with many of the band's contemporaries, including The Cure and XTC, who both seek out producer Steve Nye to work his magic on their material. The LP turns out to be Japan's last, with personal differences prompting the members to go their separate ways the following year.

With starring roles for a Korg synth and a Roland CompuRhythm CR-78 drum machine on the Rock 1 preset, 'I Can't Go For That (No Can Do)' is the soulful and irresistible new single from **DARYL HALL & JOHN OATES**. According to one review in the UK music papers, the lyrics are about bondage. "The English… everything has to do with sexual perversion, doesn't it?" says Hall. "The English press is great."

Frank Tovey, aka **FAD GADGET**, has a new album out on Mute. 'Incontinent' takes a slightly less abrasive stance than his 'Fireside Favourites' debut, employing accordion, female backing vocals, and even the dulcet tones of a jaw harp, although the cover does depict him dressed in the rather sinister garb of the puppet Mr Punch. "I was thinking about Punch a lot at the time," Tovey tells Sounds. "I think that might've come out in some of the songs."

Vini Reilly's second LP as **THE DURUTTI COLUMN** is 'LC'. It's on Factory but, rather than handing it over to Martin Hannett, he's produced this one himself. Assisted by percussionist Bruce Mitchell, it's another collection of wistful and languid sonic sketches and elegies. 'The Missing Boy' is a tribute to Joy Division singer and Reilly's friend Ian Curtis. "There was a boy / I almost knew him / A glance exchanged / Made me feel good / Leaving some signs / Now a legend."

THE SOUND's debut album achieved the admirable distinction of earning a five-star review in all three UK weekly music papers. The follow-up, 'From The Lions Mouth', is greeted with further acclaim. Adrian Borland's lyrics are brimming with angst – "Everything I touch turns to dust / Everyone I turn to, turns on me," he sings on 'Contact The Fact' – and the music veers from bleak to anthemic in an instant. This LP will surely make The Sound one of the biggest bands in Britain, won't it?



December

THE HUMAN LEAGUE's latest single from 'Dare' is 'Don't You Want Me'. It shoots to the top of the UK charts, stays there for five weeks, and becomes the best-selling single of 1981. The world, it would seem, is the League's oyster. They duly appear on the Christmas edition of 'Top Of The Pops', a performance that gets somewhat derailed when Philip Oakey and Joanne Catherall are sprayed with copious amounts of silly string by an off-camera Martin Rushent.

Another NME tape is landing on people's doormats. **'DANCIN' MASTER'** is as diverse as 'C81', but there is a groovier feel to many of the selections. And while some of the biggest hitters of the year are here – **GRACE JONES**, **TALKING HEADS**, **LINX** and **GRANDMASTER FLASH** – few tracks can match **FUNKY 4 + 1**'s 'That's The Joint' or **JAMES WHITE & THE BLACKS**' 'Contort Yourself' for upping the pulse rate.

The new **ABBA** album dominates the charts in most European countries. 'The Visitors' is their eighth LP, marking a notable change in direction for the group, who have swapped the bright pop nature of much of their previous material for more subtle and sometimes sombre synth tones. They explore darker lyrical subjects too, including break-ups – Agnetha and Björn have divorced, Frida and Benny are about to do the same – and the impact of the Cold War.

Another group thinking about the Cold War are **MOBILES**. They're from Eastbourne and their debut single is 'Drowning In Berlin', which reflects on the rising tensions between the West and the Soviet Union throughout 1981, some of it fuelled by Ronald Reagan becoming US president at the beginning of the year. It gives the band a one-off UK Top 10 hit in January 1982.

New York composer **GLENN BRANCA** explores the tonal and textural tropes of guitar extremism. His first album is 'The Ascension' on Ed Bahlman's 99 imprint, which sits on the razor's edge between academic enquiry, classical music and balls-out commitment to its own hip intensity. Guest artists include Lee Ranaldo, who plays in Branca's guitar orchestra as well as in a new NYC group called Sonic Youth.

Ian Dury sidekick and former Blockhead **CHAS JANKEL** has a new solo album out. With Dury contributing lyrics, 'Chasanova' is a delectably quirky cod-funk effort. The killer cut has to be '3,000,000 Synths', a cascading electro-boogie behemoth that finds Jankel brilliantly pushing the capacity of his Oberheim OB-X to the max. Another high point is 'Glad To Know You', which will become one of the biggest dance tracks in America in 1982.

'MODERN DANCE' is a K-Tel Records compilation of electronic pop hits from the last year or so. It's a sign of how far the genre has come and it's cracking stuff too. The 18 essential tracks include **DEPECHE MODE**'s 'New Life', **HEAVEN 17**'s 'Play To Win', **SIMPLE MINDS**' 'Love Song', **JOHN FOXX**'s 'Europe After The Rain' and **LANDSCAPE**'s 'Einstein A Go-Go', with not a duffer to speak of.

As always, there's a lot of interest in The Festive 50, the annual end-of-year chart of all-time fave tracks voted by listeners to John Peel's Radio 1 show. For the last three years, the top spot has been stubbornly held by the Sex Pistols' 'Anarchy In The UK', but the 1981 winner is **JOY DIVISION**'s 'Atmosphere'. Never mind that it wasn't released in 1981 or that 'Anarchy' will be back in pole position in 1982. The times, as somebody once said, they are a-changin'.

1981

ON REFLECTION

Influenced by Chicago deep house but with a discernible European and electro-soul twist, Electribe 101's 1990 debut album wowed critics far and wide. With a definitive reissue just out, singer Billie Ray Martin looks back at how it all fell into place

WORDS: IAN GITTINS

You know that feeling when you just blink an eye, and 34 years have gone by? Back in 1990, a curious group named Electribe 101 – four low-key Birmingham musicians and an alluring, glacially cool German siren named Billie Ray Martin – put out a debut album, a slinky exemplar of electro-soul noir called 'Electribal Memories'. It was magnificent, and I interviewed them for the now-long-defunct weekly music paper Melody Maker.

Somehow, 34 years on, the record is being rereleased on vinyl and in a deluxe four-CD edition, and I find myself once again talking to the composed Ms Martin, this time via a video call to her Berlin apartment. So, that album you made… do you feel like it was a million years ago or like it was yesterday?

"Neither," she says. "It's something that's always with me. It's part of me, and something I've grown increasingly grateful for over the years."

True. Music was always with, and part of, the woman born Birgit Dieckmann in Hamburg in 1959. Her mum worked in clubs on the Reeperbahn, including looking after The Beatles as they played 92 gigs at the Top Ten Club in 1961.

"She took them breakfast, when they were all living in one horrible room," recalls Billie.

Suitably obsessed with The Beatles and pop radio, the very young Billie also enjoyed strolls with her grandparents along the thrillingly seedy Reeperbahn.

"The bright lights gave me my sense of glamour and adventure," she explains. "Pimps with Rolexes would drive up and down. They were local characters."

Yet despite its red-light image, Hamburg was a "small, bourgeois" city and by her late teens Billie wanted out.

"I was rebelling! I always had in my head that there was something else out there. I knew I had to get to London but, before that, I went to Berlin. It was very hip then – almost at London standard."

So, was Berlin where music took centre stage in your life? I'm fixed with a very Germanic, but friendly, stare.

"No. That was when I was born."

In Berlin, Billie listened to Motown girl groups such as Martha Reeves & The Vandellas and The Supremes, but also to John Peel spinning Throbbing Gristle and Cabaret Voltaire on the BBC World Service.

"I loved both of those kinds of music," she says. "And I knew, somehow, I *had* to do both."

Ticking the first box, at least, she formed "a girl group with an 11-piece backing band" called Billie And The Deep.

"There was a big revival scene in Berlin," she says. "At our second gig, people queued around the block and went apeshit. I was like, 'Wow!'... We could have turned into something. But I still knew I had to get to London."

Arriving in the UK capital during the second half of the 80s, Billie found herself skint and crashing in a tiny room in a New Cross housing co-op ("I had a rough start"), yet she never contemplated getting a day job to tide herself over.

"No! It was music or death!"

And her arrival was immaculately timed. Hearing about "a new music – something going on", Billie went to Heaven for Paul Oakenfold's first Future/Spectrum night.

"There were only about 20 people there," she remembers. "The next week, 150. Then 500. After that, it was rammed every week. It grew like wildfire."

And another fire had been lit. Seduced by Chicago house and Balearic beats, Billie fell hard for acid house. After S'Express hit Number One in 1988 with the delirious 'Theme From S-Express', she read Mark Moore in NME saying, "Anyone who's crazy enough can join S'Express."

Then – serendipity! She bumped into him.

"It was on the dancefloor at Shoom!" she laughs. "I stared at him for a long time because I'm shy at going up to people. But finally, I went up to Mark and said, 'I'm a singer.' And he said, 'Oh, great! Give me your number!'.

"Not long afterwards he phoned me, and I was in the studio the next day. It was so much fun! Mark's engineer did all the technical stuff, so Mark was more overseeing everything. He likes to be the observer of craziness going on around him. I told him many times, 'You are the Andy Warhol of London!'."

Billie drew on her Reeperbahn childhood to co-write a song called 'Pimps, Pushers, Prostitutes' for S'Express' first album, 'Original Soundtrack'.

She also sang their third single from the album, a Sly Stone cover renamed 'Hey Music Lover', which went Top 10 early in 1989 and saw her appearing on 'Top Of The Pops'.

"It was a weird show to do," she muses. "They restrict you a lot – 'Stand there!', 'Look there!', 'Don't wear that!'. And I had to mime, which felt silly and weird. But I was devil-may-care, and I enjoyed expressing what I wanted to express.

"After the show, a woman from the NME called me 'Cilla Black on acid'. There again, she also later called me 'a cross between Honor Blackman and Kylie Minogue', which I preferred. It was just great to be talked about suddenly! I mean, who cared what they said?"

Billie was enjoying her dalliance with S'Express, yet her fervent dream remained to forge her own musical project. She placed a short but to-the-point small ad in Melody Maker which said, "SOUL REBEL SEEKS MUSICIANS. GENIUS ONLY."

Naturally, she received a wide range of responses.

"My answering-machine music used to be 'EMI' by the Sex Pistols," she recalls. "One day I got home and I had a message from Glen Matlock, answering my ad. He said, ''Ere! *I* wrote that!'. We talked, but we never met up – a shame."

More productive was a call from four Birmingham musicians – Rob Cimarosti, Brian Nordhoff, Joe Stevens and Les Fleming. They came to New Cross to meet Billie in her "horrible little room". This first encounter was not auspicious.

"I didn't like them," she admits with winning directness. "They were a weird little unit, quite insular. I couldn't understand a word they were saying because they were from Birmingham, and they looked like an East German rock group. So I said to them, 'No, I can't see any connection between us'.

"They went away, but then Brian called me and said, 'Look, we have a studio in Birmingham. You can use it to record your demos'. And I thought, 'OK yes, that *does* change things a bit'."

Billie got a train to Birmingham, clutching a song she had written called 'Talking With Myself' and an early acid house classic cut, Julian Jonah's 'Jealousy And Lies', that she had heard on the dancefloor at The Wag Club. Her goal was to make the former sound like the latter. To her delight, the Brummie East German rock group were receptive.

"They played me some demos they'd made, experimenting with Bomb The Bass-type stuff," she says. "It turned out we had the exact same ideas. And we did the demo for 'Talking With Myself' that day."

Electribe 101 were born. The newly formed band released 'Talking With Myself' on their own Hip-notic label. It got enough interest in the clubs to earn them a deal with Phonogram and, duly fortified, they began making the album that would become 'Electribal Memories'. Their modus operandi followed a pattern.

"I'd show up from London with records by people like MC 900 Ft Jesus and Jesus Loves You," remembers Billie. "The others would sit and listen to them and go, 'Wow!'. We were all listening to Marshall Jefferson, Frankie Knuckles and Fingers Inc. They were our heroes.

"The guys and I grew a bit closer. A *bit*. I was still the outsider who found it hard to tell what they were saying. But I was determined. There were times we connected really well."

Still, Billie remained wary of her new bandmates.

"I wasn't sure we could write songs together," she says.

But they did. They played 'Talking With Myself' backwards and it became 'Lipstick On My Lover'. In late 1989, a lush blast of electro-soul, 'Tell Me When The Fever Ended', went Top 40.

These were passionate songs about love gone wrong.

"Well, that's me!" nods Billie. "I never had happy relationships. So they were songs about solitude and how to live with it..."

Billie preferred solitude to what came next. As Electribe 101 got noticed, they acquired a new manager – the notoriously bumptious Tom Watkins, who had previously helmed Pet Shop Boys and was then looking after chart-strafing boy band Bros.

"I'd never heard of him," she confesses. "But the boys in the band told me he was big news. He started managing us and, with his bullshit, he got Phonogram to give us more attention. But he was… how can I say this? *Horrible*. He hated women.

"Any group he took over, he always tried to sack somebody. I was told he tried to fire Chris Lowe from the Pet Shop Boys. And he wanted to sack *me* from Electribe 101.

"He summoned me to his office and shouted, 'Unless you dye your hair red and wear a fucking bowler hat, you'll never make another record!'. I burst into tears and ran out of the room. The women who worked with him comforted me. They said, 'Billie, don't worry, he does this to everyone.'

"The Electribe guys thought it was very funny until Tom Watkins said that they had to wear matching tweed suits, like John Steed in 'The Avengers'. Then these four Brummie blokes all told him, 'Fook off!'."

Despite this bizarre management strategy, Electribe 101's star rose. A reissued 'Talking With Myself' was a massive US dance hit. Asked to remix it, Marshall Jefferson declined, saying, "She has so much soul, it's perfect already!". Frankie Knuckles did so instead.

"What an honour!" reflects Billie.

Acid house could be a faceless scene but Billie Ray Martin, a true pop star, was not faceless. She winked on the cover of i-D and graced the front of Smash Hits. She even sang with Jonathan Ross' house band on 'The Last Resort'.

"And that was when Tom Watkins said, 'Oh, she can stay, I suppose!'."

On its 1990 release, 'Electribal Memories' was hailed as a sharp union of sleek electro and sumptuous soul. Was that the masterplan?

"No!" exclaims Billie. "We never thought about that. We were just excited to launch the album at the Town & Country Club and see bootleg T-shirts being sold outside. We felt like we'd arrived."

Electribe 101 certainly *had* arrived, and reviews compared Billie to Nico.

"A huge, huge compliment," she says. "They also called me the Marlene Dietrich of techno and the Greta Garbo of house!"

However, things took a turn for the worse when they supported Depeche Mode in Europe on 1990's World Violation stadium tour.

"We didn't know Depeche Mode fans hated support bands," she sighs. "We found out on the first night, in Belgium. They booed the shit out of us, and threw everything – bottles, coins, sandwiches, shoes. It happened every single night.

"There were placards in the crowd saying, 'FUCK ELECTRIBE 101'! Depeche were lovely and very apologetic. In Paris, Alan Wilder even came onstage and said, 'Look, we invited these people to play with us – please don't throw tomatoes at them!'. It made no difference."

It was a demoralising experience, and the intra-band mood worsened when Electribe 101 began work on their second album, putatively titled 'Electribal Soul'.

"We weren't getting on," reveals Billie. "I wanted to sing big soul ballads, and I think I was pushing too hard in that direction.

"The label said we hadn't shifted enough units and they kept interfering – they said I had to change my lyrics. I said, 'No way! That's not up for discussion!'. They dropped us, and we split."

Since then, Billie Ray Martin has walked a quixotic path. She covered Throbbing Gristle's 'Persuasion' with Spooky and released an EP with The Grid. And in 1995 she had a solo moment in the sun when a luscious, self-written house-pop classic, 'Your Loving Arms', went Top 10 here in the UK and topped the US dance chart.

"Junior Vasquez asked me to perform at the Sound Factory," she says. "I got onstage at six in the morning and the place erupted! I had no idea how big the song was. It went down so well in America that I moved to New York.

"It was an incredible time. I did so many gigs, TV and radio shows. I was on 'Ricki Lake'! I walked down the street and people recognised me.

"I got red carpet treatment everywhere. But after 18 months I thought, 'No, I am European'. And I moved back to where I am more understood."

She's since recorded with both Ann Peebles and DJ Hell and, in 2010, covered the whole of Cabaret Voltaire's 1983 album, 'The Crackdown'. In 2022, she finally put out 'Electribal Soul' and saw it welcomed as a great lost treasure. What's happened since then? Well, let's just say she's keeping busy.

"I have four albums to release," she tells me. "Three are recorded, and the first one is out this year. It's all about the gentrification of Hamburg, and how the city I knew as a child has ceased to exist.

"The second album is me turning French chansons into movie soundtracks with the guys from Tindersticks. The third is just field recordings, piano and poems about loss. And the fourth will be a lo-fi soul album, like Thom Yorke's 'From The Basement' sessions, about the 1970s civil rights protest movements."

Wow! Good luck with all that, I say. You must let me know how you get on.

"Oh, I will," she smiles. "When we talk again in 34 years."

The deluxe reissue of 'Electribal Memories' is out now on Demon

BUGGED OUT

With a deluxe reissue of their gloriously quirky 'Neveroddoreven' album, their first live dates in nearly two decades and fresh material in the offing, I Monster – Dean Honer and Jarrod Gosling – are back with a vengeance

WORDS: STEPHEN DALTON

A blustery winter afternoon in the People's Republic of Sheffield. From outside, this quiet cul-de-sac looks like just another nondescript suburban terrace in the city's handsome southern suburbs. Inside, a very different picture emerges – a psychedelic TARDIS of antique analogue synthesisers, surrealistic pop art, vintage film posters, samplers, vocoders and all manner of Betamax-era technology. There is even a theremin signed by Bob Moog himself.

Welcome to the home studio of Dean Honer, half of I Monster, fixtures on the Sheffield electronic music scene throughout the last three decades. Avuncular and deadpan, Honer sports a fulsome beard, jaunty cap and sturdy dad jeans. His long-time musical partner, Jarrod Gosling, wears own-brand Lidl socks and a woollen hat. Together with your scruffy correspondent, we make an odd spectacle – three middle-aged men all slightly baffled by the modern digital age. Imagine a special episode of 'Last Of The Summer Wine' set in a radiophonic junk shop.

Honer and Gosling have been making music for more than 30 years, together and separately, with I Monster just one of their projects. In between irregular albums of sample-delic, psychotronic, electro-funky beatscapes, they have recorded or performed with pretty much all of Sheffield's pop Premier League, from Tony Christie to Jarvis Cocker, Stephen Mallinder to Russell Senior, Richard Hawley to Róisín Murphy. Admittedly the duo have not yet ticked Arctic Monkeys off their Sheffield music bingo card, but they have a long history with drummer and Monkeys producer Ross Orton. Not forgetting Satan's Toilet.

"Satan's Toilet used to come into your studio, didn't they?" Gosling grins, nudging Honer. "Comedy thrash band. The drummer used to play on a toilet which he'd take around with him…"

I Monster have been semi-dormant for most of the last decade, with Gosling and Honer occupied on other projects. Most prominently, Dean Honer has a cluster of collaborations with prolific electro producer Adrian Flanagan – namely International Teachers Of Pop, The Eccentronic Research Council, The Moonlandingz, and Acid Klaus.

Jarrod Gosling, meanwhile, indulges his prog, psych and folk side with his Cobalt Chapel and Regal Worm projects. He also designs the artwork for I Monster and has a visual art sideline under the name Varrod Goblink, crafting award-winning sleeves for prog rocker Tim Bowness and others. A playful riff on how a French magazine once misspelled his name, this comical alias sounds like it should be Gosling's porn name.

"Well, it is *one* of them," he deadpans.

But I Monster are now resurgent and very busy again, readying a deluxe reissue of their second album 'Neveroddoreven' on double gatefold vinyl, with three previously unreleased tracks of cinematic trip hop and electro-soul balladry. Originally released in 2003, a revamped version – which this reissue reflects – came out in 2004. They're also currently rehearsing for their first live tour in 18 years, and are simultaneously pulling together their first full studio album in almost a decade.

The reason for this sudden flurry of activity is that very modern phenomenon – unexpectedly going viral. I Monster, says Gosling, are having a "Kate Bush moment". Until recently, the duo were best-known for 'Daydream In Blue', a Top 20 hit in 2001. Based on a sample of Günter Kallmann Choir's version of the 1969 song 'Daydream' by Belgian band Wallace Collection, this trippy vocoder reverie became a recurring soundtrack staple on TV shows and commercials, and remains so even to this day. It was also sampled by rapper Lupe Fiasco for his 2006 Grammy-winning hit 'Daydreamin''.

But during 2022, another of the duo's archive songs – the sumptuous, smokey-voiced, James Bond-sized chanson 'Who Is She?' – became a global TikTok sensation, inspiring a flood of online dance clips. Since then, these DIY dance-offs have exploded into a major TikTok sensation in their own right, boosted by Wednesday Addams fans and celebrities like Kim Kardashian. The clips have now racked up more than 115 million views.

Ironically enough, 'Who Is She?' was initially planned as the follow-up to 'Daydream In Blue', but the band's label and pluggers decided it didn't have hit potential.

"We had an expensive video made, and remixes," Honer shrugs. "But it didn't end up coming out as a single proper, just as a vinyl EP. It was on the album and it just sat there. And then, 20 years later, it blows up out of nowhere with a whole new generation of people."

Although they are synonymous with Sheffield, in truth I Monster straddle the north-south divide. Gosling is a local, but Honer was actually born and raised in Stanford-le-Hope in Essex, a Thames Estuary town deep in Depeche Mode country. In a plot twist worthy of Richard Curtis, it was a teenage romance with a girl named Rachel that led him to South Yorkshire. More than 30 years later, he is still here, married with grown-up children and deeply woven into the city's musical DNA.

"I went on holiday to Spain when I was 17 with my mate, and I met a girl from Sheffield," he recalls. "She was moving down to London with her friends, and I was moving to London from Essex. We ended up moving in together. And then I used to visit Sheffield with her. She'd go back and see her family. And her brother was Russell Senior, who was in Pulp."

This was in the 1980s, when Pulp were just embryonic indie outsiders. But Honer was already enamoured by an older generation of Sheffield electronic and post-punk bands.

"I always liked Sheffield music," he says, nodding. "I love The Human League. I love Cabaret Voltaire, especially. And Clock DVA. It always seemed like a mysterious, really cool, dark place, Sheffield. I don't think I'd been further north than fucking Clacton or something. But yeah, I just really liked it up here. So we ended up moving. I joined various different bands, set up a little studio in town, went to university and settled down."

The romance with Rachel Senior did not last, but Honer's love affair with Sheffield has endured three decades. First he joined a band called This Machine Kills, but his musical interest was increasingly drawn to programming, sampling and multitrack recording. In 1990, he opened his first studio, Neptune, in conjunction with Duncan Wheat of local post-punk band The Midnight Choir.

Gosling, meanwhile, was playing bass in rock bands, but finding his own tastes were radically changing on hearing techno, electro and hip hop played alongside indie rock at clubs like The Leadmill.

The emerging Warp label were also a major influence as they began to rewire Sheffield's musical landscape. While studying art, Gosling began making primitive electronica on his college's Akai sampler and Atari computer. Then a summer job at the steelworks helped him save enough for his own basic Atari system at home.

When Gosling ran into Honer at Sheffield Central Library, a natural studio partnership was born, bonded by a shared love of Kraftwerk, krautrock and vintage horror films. The duo began making music together, initially under the name Melt.

"This was about 1991," Gosling says. "The first stuff we were doing was sort of Warp-style, bleepy, but moving on from that as well. Then the 'Artificial Intelligence' stuff came out. So we started expanding what we were doing – becoming more ambient, more psychedelic."

Honer eventually closed Neptune Studios.

"Because it wasn't viable," he shrugs.

"And because they knocked it down," Gosling adds helpfully.

Instead, Honer set up a home studio in the house he shared with Jason Buckle, later of electroclash band Fat Truckers and Jarvis Cocker's post-Pulp project, Relaxed Muscle. Through legendary Sheffield producer Robert Gordon, Warp co-founder and member of pioneering techno outfit Forgemasters, Honer met Richard Barratt, aka DJ Parrot, who had recently worked with Cabaret Voltaire's Richard H Kirk in the Warp-signed duo, Sweet Exorcist.

"Parrot was looking for someone with analogue synths and a cheap studio to work with," Honer recalls. "He actually brought an early version of Add N To (X) – he produced that and I engineered it. Then I went on to produce some Add N To (X) stuff as well."

In 1997, Honer, Parrot and Buckle formed South Yorkshire studio supergroup All Seeing I, whose sample-heavy dance-pop featured lyrics and occasional vocals by Jarvis Cocker, alongside fellow Sheffield luminaries Phil Oakey, Tony Christie, Babybird's Stephen Jones and others.

They scored a run of big hits in 1998 and 1999, notably 'Beat Goes On' (a snappy rework of Sonny & Cher's 1967 toe-tapper 'The Beat Goes On') and 'Walk Like A Panther', which featured Christie on vocals. Their sole album, 'Pickled Eggs And Sherbet', was released in 1999.

Chart success brought All Seeing I a flood of offers from big stars and major labels. As a result, Honer co-produced a cover version of 'Beat Goes On' by Britney Spears for her debut album, '…Baby One More Time', which scored mega-selling success on its release in 1999. But the group declined a Madonna remix which, with hindsight, Honer admits was "really stupid".

"We didn't turn down working with Madonna," he clarifies. "We were getting loads of remixes for the All Seeing I and one was a Madonna track, but we didn't know what to do with it, really. And we had other stuff to do, so we said no. I think it was more of a time thing really."

CASIO

klaus schulze
'trancefer'

All Seeing I dissolved after short-lived success, but Honer and Gosling kept I Monster going in parallel, enjoying some reflected glory and signing a lucrative record deal of their own. Their 1999 debut album, 'These Are Our Children', only had a limited private release because of concerns over some of the samples used. But 'Daydream In Blue' became a Top 20 single in 2001, paving the way for 'Neveroddoreven'.

Around the same time, I Monster also scored mixing and remixing credits on Moby's electro-rock blockbuster 'Play', working on the tracks 'Natural Blues' and 'Bodyrock'. Sadly they do not earn royalty points on its 12 million-plus sales.

"As seen in loads of charity shops," Honer quips. "That's when you've really made it – when your name is on something in a charity shop."

'Neveroddoreven' remains I Monster's commercial peak to date. In the years since, Dean Honer and Jarrod Gosling have only released four full albums under their group name, but they have collaborated on multiple side projects. In 2011, Honer reconnected with Phil Oakey when he and Gosling produced and co-wrote The Human League's ninth album, 'Credo', steering them back towards their classic analogue synth sound three decades after 'Dare'.

"We love their pre-pop stuff," Honer says. "They were very open to it. They liked it, but their label, Wall Of Sound, wanted to make it a bit more pumping and dancey. So there was a slight conflict there, and sometimes I think it fell between two stools. But it worked for them in terms of getting them off the retro circuit, playing gigs with five other bands from 1983. And they started doing their own tours – big tours around the world."

I Monster started out as left-field pop stars, but have become increasingly esoteric over the last decade, releasing an album devoted to the Moog synthesiser called 'Bright Sparks' (2016) and an EP of HP Lovecraft stories – 2017's 'A Dollop Of HP' – set to eerie music. Honer insists that they were never focused on commercial success.

"Even with 'Daydream', we always thought we were creating experimental music – just enjoying trying to make music that we hadn't really heard before."

Indeed, in 2022 Honer released his most alluringly weird album yet, 'Frogman', a slab of conceptual electronica designed to sound like a haunting sci-fi horror drama made by Yorkshire Television in the late 1970s. Recorded on an old EMS Synthi, the fabled briefcase model made famous by Brian Eno, it featured a story written by avant-folk musician Will Goddard, aka Supreme Vagabond Craftsman, with various guest narrators. Pulp veteran Russell Senior appears in the vocal cast, a nicely symmetrical throwback to Honer's early days in Sheffield.

"Very experimental, not musical at all," Honer asserts. "I gave it to Will because he does a lot of writing. I asked if he wanted to write a weird sci-fi story over the top, and he did. He wrote this thing about a frogman guy living in the Peak District. And I asked Russell because he wanted kind of a Sheffield voice on it."

In common with much of I Monster's work, 'Frogman' digs into that rich memory pool of 1970s public information films, creepy children's TV dramas, vintage horror movies and occult literature. Like a musical version of the satirical website Scarfolk, the duo's music seems to stem from a hauntological hinterland of analogue echoes, radiophonic ripples and mesmerising sci-fi lullabies.

All this stuff, says Honer, is just "swimming around in our cultural memory", but Gosling, it seems, has no time for fancy academic theories.

"The whole hauntology thing, I think it's wank," he shrugs. "Like the folk horror thing – 'The Wicker Man' – it's a great film, blah blah blah. But people making a career from that, from sort of library music… there's a lot of it about. A little of it goes a long way."

Honer finds the very idea of sample-driven bands like I Monster being labelled "retro" pretty meaningless in a postmodern era of blurred generation gaps and infinite digital access to past musical decades.

"The whole time period of music is weird now, isn't it?" he says. "The first acid house track was 1987 – more than 35 years ago. What was happening in music 35 years before us? The swing band era. But people are still thinking this is the music of the future. It's not really, is it? It's just like Showaddywaddy, basically."

So I Monster are essentially the Showaddywaddy of acid house then?

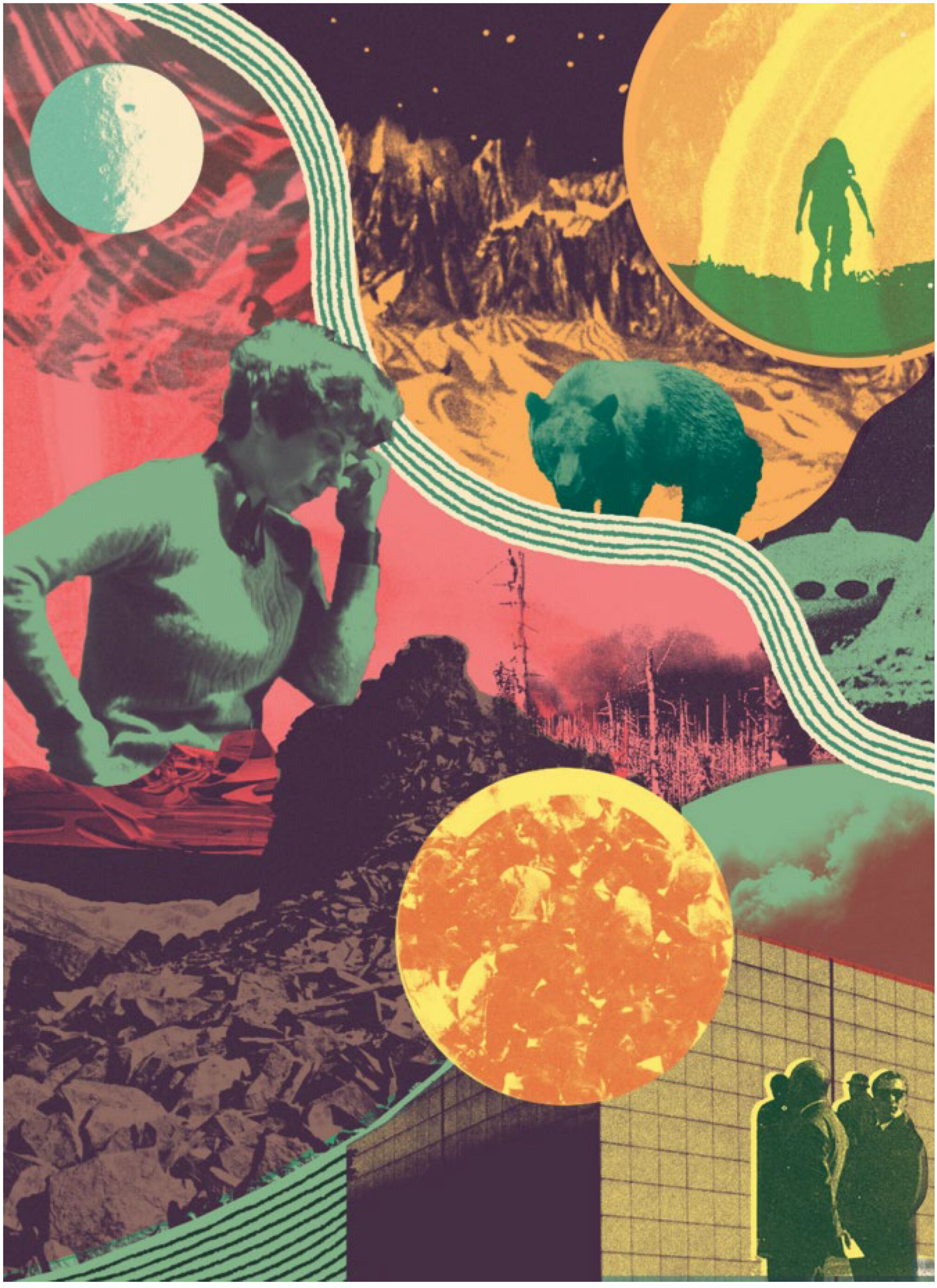
"Rather that than Gary Glitter," Dean Honer nods. "For legal reasons."

For now, I Monster are looking forward, not backward. Following the reissue of 'Neveroddoreven' and their tour, they plan to finish their next studio album, with around 30 new tracks already written and, fingers crossed, some legendary electropop guests featuring.

"I don't think you'll find any hauntology on our new record," Jarrod Gosling quips.

The past is an endlessly shifting hall of mirrors, the future wide open. But the rough beast called I Monster has stirred from its slumber, and is slouching towards Sheffield to be reborn. The Satan's Toilet revival starts now.

'Neveroddoreven' is out now on Dharma



CALIFORNIA SCHEMING

DOROTHY MOSKOWITZ

In the 1960s, Dorothy Moskowitz voyaged through the heart of the US avant-garde, a journey culminating in the explosive psychedelia of her influential band, The United States Of America. Six decades on, the essence of that artistic revolution is emerging again

WORDS: BOB FISCHER

"My very first serious approach to making discordant, ambient music using computers came during the firestorm of 2020," begins Dorothy Moskowitz. "We saw the sun turn bright red, and we couldn't leave the house. We were stuck inside for days, so I went up to the computer and wrote something called 'September Burn'. We've had several firestorms since then, when we simply couldn't breathe – they're 50 miles away, but they affect the entire Bay Area in a heinous way.

"On a lighter note, when I first moved to California, I had jersey sweaters and a few linen pants. Now I have winter clothes and I have summer clothes, just as I did when I was growing up in New York. It's a very different sort of weather system, and who knows what's going to happen from day to day?"

As we speak, it's a mild Thursday morning in Dorothy's now-native Oakland, San Francisco, with little sign of the wildfires that have brought widespread devastation to the Golden State in recent summers. But the spectre of climate change still casts a deep shadow over her latest musical project, 'The Afterlife'.

It's a compelling collaboration with arguably Sweden's most accomplished musical anagram – Peter Olof Fransson, whose recordings as Retep Folo have combined alluringly old-school synths with an offbeat jazz sensibility. 'The Afterlife' adds a darker aesthetic, with Dorothy's spoken word contributions and haunting harmonies punctuated by squalls of electronic noise.

"Facebook was our connection," she explains. "Peter sent me a message and introduced himself. And instantly I was a fan. There was just something about the track and the video he sent that reminded me of where my head was artistically in the early 1960s. There was some commonality between his aesthetic and mine, and I had this curious sensation of having known him in some way. When he said he was concerned about climate change, and how global warming threatened the existence of the human species, I didn't need any convincing to go forward with text and lyrics that supported him.

"The other thing that attracted me was the way he made his videos. I'm not sure if anyone knows who Ray Johnson is? He was an avant-garde collage artist in the early 1960s, running something he called the New York Correspondence School. He would send out postcards of random snippets to people, and you would add your own snippet and post it back to him. I was absolutely fascinated by the way he created collage, with the juxtaposition of unlikely elements, and there were similarly unusual collisions in Peter's work."

And how, I wonder, do those artistic collisions translate into Retep Folo's musical compositions?

"In the avoidance of cliche," she replies. "While 'The Afterlife' sounds very easy to listen to, he's doing 5/4 time and using cadences that you expect to be symmetrical – but they're not. Also, there's a whiff of analogue sound. You hear the smell of analogue music in there, don't you?"

Absolutely. There's a splendid waft of the old school in there. Whirring tape machines and studios with egg boxes on the walls.

"That's what he was after," smiles Dorothy. "I'm not sure how he treated my voice – he didn't have ring modulators and the whole hocus-pocus we had with The United States Of America. But he really wanted a specific sound, and I like that sound."

The Dorothy Moskowitz story is complicated and compelling, with some frequently eyebrow-raising diversions. It began amid the hurly-burly of 1940s New York, where she was surrounded by a myriad of cosmopolitan influences.

"My mother's family was pretty musical," she recalls. "She had a lilting voice, and often told me that my slightly breathy sound reminded her of her own father, who could lead services in Hungary without formal cantorial training. My older sister studied classical piano and even performed professionally in her younger days.

"But it was probably my tone-deaf father who influenced me the most. Max Moskowitz had no memory for lyrics, but it never deterred him from singing random snatches of some 'Grand Ole Opry' tune in an odd Carpathian accent. He was not easily embarrassed, and he needed no coaxing at a bar mitzvah or wedding to display his kazatsky skills."

What she describes as a "turning point" came in early 1960s Manhattan. As a student at Barnard College, the women's college of Columbia University, she heard Karlheinz Stockhausen's 1955 opus 'Gesang Der Jünlinge'. Combining disorienting electronic pulses with the manipulated vocals of 12-year-old chorister Josef Protschka, this pioneering composition made an indelible impression on the 21-year-old Dorothy.

"It was a tape concert at MacMillan Hall on the Columbia campus," she explains. "This was the late spring of 1962. There was no maestro with a baton, there were no harmonies and no accessible melody or pulse – just the sound of a child's voice combined with ethereal electronica. It held enormous emotional power.

"Until that moment, I was a collegiate tunesmith. But a few months later, I met Joseph Byrd, who introduced me to the Fluxus-inspired avant-garde artists in Manhattan. His closest friends were the composers Malcolm Goldstein, Phil Corner and La Monte Young, the artist Marian Zazeela and the percussionist Max Neuhaus, who had actually toured with Stockhausen. There were happenings, with pieces that could run for hours, and all of this ferment was life-changing."

By 1963 she was in a relationship with Byrd, and by the mid-1960s the pair had decamped from New York to Los Angeles. There, they befriended a married couple whose experimental electronic soundtrack to a classic science fiction film, created using hand-built vacuum tube-based circuits, had seen them cold-shouldered by the conservative gatekeepers of the mainstream film and music industry alike.

"Louis and Bebe Barron had written the musical score for 'Forbidden Planet' in the late 1950s," says Dorothy. "But they'd fallen into obscurity due to the machinations of the music industry and the unions. They were not considered to be composers. Joseph brought me over to visit them, and they invited us into the room where they kept their tubes – in stack upon stack of iron cages.

"We tiptoed in, as though they'd taken us into a nursery. Bebe explained that the tubes had a life of their own, and that their sounds would only extinguish at their own pace. I found out later that Louis had invented these sounds himself – he was very adept at what was called 'cybernetics' at the time. But it was Bebe that created the leitmotifs. She came up with individual sounds for each of the characters in the movie."

In 1967, Moskowitz and Byrd formed The United States Of America, a band whose self-titled 1968 debut – their only album – remains potent and powerful, a giddy concoction of psychedelia, sound collage, electronic experimentation and Dorothy's own strikingly manipulated vocals. The venture, however, was disappointingly short-lived. By the end of the year, the band had split. Almost six decades on, she seems rueful that their music sacrificed the pioneering spirit of her formative years for a more commercial approach.

"In other interviews, I've talked about the elements that led to our early demise," says Dorothy. "The conflicts and the dying label support. But there's another thread that I haven't traced before. It has to do with that experimental world that I described earlier – that Fluxus-inspired coterie in New York in the early 1960s.

"What we all seemed to share was a love of Dadaism. And it wasn't nostalgia, it was more like a game plan that favoured random collisions, with no outdated aesthetics involved. So when Joseph asked me to move from New York, I assumed we would be staging happening-like events, being confrontational, even asking the audience to create random noises. Very little of this actually took place. Maybe that was my greatest disappointment – we were trying too hard to be mainstream. Had we been truer to our experimental roots, we might have held together more easily."

However, the influence of Louis and Bebe Barron continued to be pervasive.

"They came to one of our concerts," says Dorothy. "I got to be friendly with Bebe, but at the time she wasn't composing. She had opened up a boutique in Santa Monica called Ephemera. If you look at the US Of A album cover, down at the very bottom, it says 'Costumes by Ephemera'.

"So that's how I got to know Bebe personally – I asked her questions about composition, and she turned me from a frumpy ex-hippy into something that was pretty strange! I looked like something out of 'A Clockwork Orange'.

"I was wearing a derby hat, a bobby cape and bright shiny silver stockings, and that was all Bebe Barron's creation. We'd get to walking and talking, and I'd ask her about composition. One day, I asked about the fact that each of these tubes had its own lifespan and that she didn't know what was going to happen. She said, 'Dorothy, that's the wonderful thing about it – you just have to let the circuitry run its course'."

And ain't that a fine metaphor for life?

"I'm writing a song about it!" laughs Dorothy. "When I make electronic music now, I'll sometimes lay a patch into a place where it's not intended. I'll copy a drum track into an oboe track and sometimes the collisions can be very surprising. And I don't correct them, because Bebe's ghost is in my office saying, 'Let the circuitry run its course, Dorothy'."

The circuitry ran in some typically fascinating directions. She speaks fondly of her time in the All-Star Band of psychedelic folkster Country Joe McDonald, opening for The Who in Paris and recording at Studio Hérouville, the 'Honky Château' studio once so beloved of Elton John. Then, by the mid-1970s, she was working as a voiceover artist on 'Sesame Street', providing half-sung narration for a jazz-fuelled piece of animation that has since become the subject of much online consternation.

'Cracks' tells the story of a young girl who sees the fissures in her bedroom wall transformed into a menagerie of animals. Aired fleetingly between 1975 and 1980, it was then banished – for reasons unknown – to a dusty archive, existing only in the realms of fuzzy childhood memory. To seasoned US hauntologists, it has taken on mythical status.

"There's a lot of action on the internet about it," says Dorothy. "When I tried to do the research, I found the woodwind player, the great Mel Martin, had passed away. The producer and probable scriptwriter Peter Scott was long-gone too, and his family didn't know anything about it. The only person left who might know something was Andy Narell, the steel drum player.

"But talk of hauntology… when we were recording it, a curious apparition appeared in the studio. A wraith of a young woman floated in, wearing shroud-like threads. Her name sounded invented, something like 'Ether' or 'Skyward', and she said [floaty, ethereal voice], 'We'll be finishing the animation soooooon'. A real white witch of a voice!

"I never heard anything more about it until decades later. Never saw it on TV. I was very surprised to learn it had creeped out so many youngsters, and that no one was able to find any record of it for so many years. In 2019, I started getting enquiries about it and that led to a podcast and some media attention. I wasn't previously aware that I was the focus of such nostalgia. Maybe I'm the Grandma Moses of hauntology!"

'The Afterlife' too, I suggest, has affectingly hauntological overtones, albeit with something of a family feel. There are immaculate harmonies from both Dorothy and her daughter Melissa – herself an accomplished performer with Seattle yacht rock outfit Point Of Sail – while Melissa's sister Jessica provides atmospheric field recordings. And threaded throughout is an oddly chilling narrative provided by Dorothy's school-age grandson, Hudson.

"Because of the ecological aspect, Peter wanted the sound of a child's voice, and for this album to be addressed to future generations," explains Dorothy. "'What will they think of our slipshod approach to the planet's falling apart?' So he gave me a little script, and my grandson was barely five years old when he recorded it. Peter mixed him lower than I would have done, possibly to capture the essence of what was being said rather than the content – a child is watching us from somewhere, and soon that child will be 40 years old and saying, 'What happened here?'.

"He's a Lego addict and he builds things five times his size, so he was very busy with his Lego while I was feeding him his lines. His real name is Hudson, but he changed it to Boom when he was three or four. I said, 'Why Boom?', and he replied, 'Because I'm an astronaut!'."

And with that, the circuitry – for this conversation, at least – has run its course. Dorothy talks excitedly of future projects and collaborations, but is keen to sign off by stressing the genius of her most recent musical partner.

"'The Afterlife' is Peter's masterpiece," she affirms. "I was just lucky enough to be called in on it."

'The Afterlife' is out now on Buried Treasure

DOUBLE

VISION

Incorporating house, dub, ambient and synthwave hues, Indian producer Sahej Bakshi – aka Dualist Inquiry – creates scintillating and gorgeously wonky sonic sketches

WORDS: MAT SMITH
PICTURES: ANUSHKA MENON

"It's been seven years since I wrote my last album," says producer and electronic musician Sahej Bakshi. He's speaking to me from his home in Goa on the south-west coast of India, where he says the summer heat is already becoming unbearable.

Bakshi has been making music under the name Dualist Inquiry since 2010. With 'Doppelganger' (2013) and 'Dreamcatcher' (2016), he took dance music's templates and toolkit as his starting point, but delivered tracks with an individual sound, voice and philosophy. His third album, 'When We Get There', remains faithful to that questing, idiosyncratic approach to electronic music. It's an approach that places him at the exciting centre of India's burgeoning and vibrant dance music scene, with his music as well-suited to a massive festival stage as it is to a club.

Much has happened in Bakshi's life since he dropped the 'Dreamcatcher' album. The shared experience and disruption of the global pandemic was one thing. It brought club culture and his relentless touring schedule to an abrupt halt. Becoming a father, with the manifold personal changes that inevitably brings, was another.

"I think, after three or four years, people stopped asking if I was doing anything new," says Bakshi, with a laugh. "That meant I could take my time and do what I wanted. It took a lot of the pressure off my shoulders."

That welcome absence of expectation has enabled Bakshi to deliver an exceptionally strong piece of work, full of nuance, colour and emotional depth. It's an album that both accepts and fears the realities of existence. And it's one that you can dance to, even if that's through a veil of tears.

The overwhelming impact of first-time parenthood in 2022 fed directly into the creation of 'When We Get There', giving some of the pieces a celebratory feeling, while the whole record is presented as a journey through the upheaval and seeing life in a completely new light.

Not for nothing does the opening title track begin with a recording of a pilot warning about turbulence in the skies ahead, before offering a positive reading of the weather conditions on the ground at their final destination.

With that metaphor occupying the first few seconds, 'When We Get There' embodies the notion of a significant change having occurred in Bakshi's life. While it's a direct reflection of his own personal experiences, it's universally relatable too, and I found myself looking back on the complex feelings and emotions I experienced when I had my first child. When I tell him this, he says it gives him goosebumps.

"You're talking about the emotional core of the music, which for me became the most important thing when I was writing this," he says. "Creating that response when you listen to a track became my criteria for whether a song made it onto the album or not. It had to have a quality that grabbed you emotionally."

Bakshi admits that it took a while for the theme of his new tracks to fully lock itself into place. He talks about whole albums and EPs of material that didn't pass his high emotional watermark, all of which were discarded, unlikely ever to see the light of day. During the course of a single weekend, the aesthetic of what he wanted to write revealed itself to him.

"I was talking with a close friend and he was like, 'So this album is about your daughter, right?'," explains Bakshi. "My first answer was, 'No, it's not'. It's more like a piece of personal writing – just for me. It's like my diary in a way. I don't want to place her at the centre of something that I'm doing… a bit like not wanting to put pictures of her on social media – she's a part of my life, but she's not mine in that way.

"Probably the best way I can describe it is that her arrival, the anticipation towards her arrival, plus everything that happened since, was a catalyst to send me on a path of reminiscing, of nostalgia, of coming to grips with my own age, with my parents' age. I'm lucky to still have my grandparents, but having a child makes you start to see the wheels of life turning. It was a bit unsettling."

Bakshi describes feeling being trapped between a sense of joyfulness, trepidation and an intense melancholy, all of which can be heard across 'When We Get There'.

"Somebody said to me that having a kid really reminds you of your own mortality," he reflects. "And I think that's totally true, because you start to see the generational wheels turning. My parents and my grandparents are a lot older now – my grandfather is 90 – so having a child just gives you this overwhelming sense of inevitability."

If there's one word that resonates with Bakshi about 'When We Get There', it's "caution".

"The process of writing the album was a very scary one for me," he admits. "I tried to write an album many times over the last seven years. The clock was not ticking, exactly, but there was this sort of self-imposed pressure. You know, 'If you're gonna wait that long, you better not disappoint'. I really didn't know whether I'd manage to successfully channel all my emotions into a piece of music."

He details the process of turning up at his studio every day and trying to push through that fear. The results of that experience were varied. On some occasions, he felt like he was being enveloped positively by his own music, and at other times, as if he was being slapped by it, leading to a sort of creative paralysis that could only be resolved by leaving the studio and coming back fresh the next day.

"The title of the album, 'When We Get There', had something to do with that for me," he muses. "It refers to the end of the long process of writing the album, but it's also like life itself. There were a lot of those sorts of themes going into what I was doing."

You can hear Bakshi's trepidation in a number of ways on the album. On 'Days Away' and 'Times Go By', the framing feels energetic and danceable, but the details feel muted, uncertain and gloomy. It's an effect that arrests any sense of euphoria. Elsewhere, most of the tracks have a slight tremble or quiver. Once you notice it, you find it everywhere on 'When We Get There', almost as if the sounds themselves are trying to assert and reinforce the idea of a turbulent journey where there are many bumps, twists and hazards.

"That was very much intentional," reveals Bakshi. "In fact, this was one of the breakthroughs that I had in determining the quality and texture of the album. One of the problems I have is with sweetness. In an electronic context, if you're using clean, digital, sweet sounds and melodies, it starts to feel a bit unbearable and sickly. For me, electronic music doesn't pair so well with bright stuff. It just starts to sound too pop."

He recalls an epiphany while listening to 'Suddenly', the 2020 album from Caribou. He noticed that even in the album's sharpest moments, there was what felt like a deliberate wonkiness and grubbiness to the way the sounds and hooks were presented. Listening to that intently, Bakshi realised this was precisely the effect that would convey the feelings feeding into his own tracks. He acquired some audio degradation software and emulators, and began applying those qualities to what he was making.

"It all became part of my process," he recalls. "Once a track was getting close to being done, I would be like, 'OK, now it's time to make it dirty'. I'd sit there listening with my eyes closed. I'd turn a knob and the whole thing would go a little bit wavy. That was how I could finally get comfortable making sweet-sounding music."

Another way that Bakshi introduced unpredictability was with a Buchla soft synth, which you can hear prominently on 'I Need To Know', one of the tracks that exudes vulnerability with its wobbly textures. Whether in physical or software form, the Buchla has often represented a challenge for even the most experienced electronic musicians. For Bakshi, the synth offered an opportunity to introduce non-linearity and randomness, perfectly offsetting the grid of beats that typically underpin his music.

"I just recorded it for nine minutes, while I noodled around with the knobs," he explains. "At the end of that I had everything I needed. On its own, that recording made very little musical sense, but I extracted little loops and variations from that longer jam in order to make it into a song. And then I kind of added on structure by providing an identifiable bassline and a root note.

"I like to experiment, but I definitely need to have something relatable at the heart of whatever I do. When I listen to the album, I have a real soft spot for 'I Need To Know', because of how different the process was for me compared with anything else I've ever done."

I spoke to Bakshi not long after he'd appeared at India's Lollapalooza festival at the Mahalaxmi Race Course in Mumbai. During his performance on the Nexa stage, he played tracks from 'When We Get There' with a full band.

"Everything about that festival is sort of supersized," he says with a grin. "The size of the stage is massive, the size of the crowd is huge. I also decided to do a supersized show for myself, which involved having a string quartet, a couple of horn players, a drummer and bassist. We only had three days of rehearsals because that's just how Bombay is. Everyone is always so busy. We had an incredible visual set-up, and it was pretty amazing to see the music being played live like that."

Bakshi wanted the show to draw out the depth of the album, while also staying true to its electronic presentation.

"I had a lot of very unusual directives and directions for my band, such as telling the drummer to think like a drum machine," he continues. "I just wanted him to keep going. It was this very electronic way of thinking. It was the same with all the other players – I told them they couldn't add any unnecessary frills and flourishes. I was hoping that we could have everybody locked in, in repetition, because in electronic music repetition is so important. I got a few raised eyebrows in the beginning, but by the end, they were really feeling it too."

A sensational rendering of the tracks from 'When We Get There' was not the only memorable thing for Bakshi about performing at the festival. In a moment of kismet, when he was booked, the booking agent told him he would be performing immediately before Caribou.

"My heart just stopped," gushes Bakshi. "I literally had a tear in my eye, and was just dumbfounded. I got to meet Dan Snaith from Caribou backstage on the day we performed, and I got to tell him about how his music inspired the wobbliness of 'When We Get There'. I told him that it's like the sea salt in the chocolate chip cookie. It makes it all palatable. I'm not so into sweetness, but a little bit of salt in the cookie goes a long way.

"It was a wonderful 'full circle' moment, where I got to say thanks to the person whose work I gathered all of this from. I can't live without it now. When I'm writing new music, I know that whatever I'm doing is going to go through this process of degradation a little bit further down the line. It's become very much a part of my process and my sound."

'When We Get There' is out now on Dualism

TIME RAG

"There's so much that the voice can do rather than just be singing lyrics," says Arushi Jain, reflecting on one of the key elements of her mesmeric sound. "It's an instrument, a texture palette."

A modular synth composer and engineer based between New Delhi and New York, Jain's versatile and entrancing voice often adorns her unfurling ambient creations, a distinctive combination that has quickly catapulted her to fame. Her first album, 2021's 'Under The Lilac Sky', was recorded in California and saw her brandishing a modular synth against a tranquil forest backdrop on the cover.

Released on the well-regarded experimental imprint Leaving Records, that album announced Jain's take on ambient music over six cosmic tracks, designed to be listened to as the sun sets. Since then, she's played at the Hollywood Bowl and festivals around the world, while hosting her own shows on online radio stations NTS in London and The Lot in Brooklyn, NYC.

Jain's new record, 'Delight', is a major expansion of her sound, adding acoustic instrumentation and fresh influences to her repertoire. On 'I Surrender', meandering synth melodies and waves of interstellar effects are doused in reverb, creating an all-enveloping atmosphere. Elsewhere, 'Imagine An Orchestra' finds flute runs interlacing with metallic bleeps and playful leads. On 'Play In The Void', her voice is central, a melodic counterbalance to the pulsing bass tones and skittering rhythms that emerge as the track builds. And for 'Our Touching Tongues', her vocals are processed and glitched via a modular set-up.

For Jain, vocal chords simply become another sound source for her electronic expansions. The theme of 'Delight' is the experience of this elusive emotion, and how it manifests in day-to-day life, whether through the creation of music, or in any other thing that brings us pleasure.

"For me, 'Delight' is very personal," she says from her Brooklyn apartment. "It's an internal acknowledgement that something is beautiful – it's for yourself, and very private. Like a reflection about this current moment that made you feel delight. It's an extremely important and motivating emotion for me. It *is* fleeting, but there are certain ways you can access those states again."

The album – which draws some musical influence from the raga Bageshri, a melodic framework deriving from Indian classical music – was mostly made at a rural retreat in Long Island, New York. The tranquillity of the setting couldn't help but have some influence on the music Jain made there.

"I was by myself for a full month in my friend's house," she explains. "I purposely isolated and would wake up at 5am and do voice practice until the sun rose, and then journal and do my workout. It really helped me with the composition – because I was in this environment, the sound aesthetic of that seeped into the music. There were all these deer in the forest area around the house, and in the morning I'd be singing, and they would show up. It was so beautiful – it would start getting light and I would see deer sitting on the other side of the glass."

Jain grew up in New Delhi and started singing when she was around six. She studied Indian classical music later on, inside and outside of school, developing her vocal skills in the choir until she moved to California to study programming and computer science at 17. There, she stopped singing for a while, but discovered a new form of music-making that would spark her imagination.

"I'd finished all my requirements by senior year, so I took a class for fun – the laptop orchestra class at Stanford's CCRMA, their centre for computer music," she says. "It required me to build an instrument using my laptop. We were using this programming language that my professor created called ChucK, and I got introduced to the concept of sound synthesis in my computer. It just blew my mind – I had no idea.

"This put my two worlds together in a way where I was able to bring something back into my life that I'd been missing and use a skill set that I'd only learned in the past few years, so it felt really exciting."

Deploying contemporary electronics that riff on Indian classical idioms, modular synthesist Arushi Jain crafts potent and beguiling otherworldly sounds

WORDS: BEN MURPHY
PICTURE: ZARA SARAON

Jain gravitated towards the world of modular synths, especially the mix-and-match approach of Eurorack, finding a connection between that and the computer programming community she'd been immersed in.

"It reminds me a bit of the open-source software world," she says. "There are a lot of developers and engineers making different parts of the stack – types of modules, creating their own mini-world. You have access to it and you can pick and choose what you like sonically, depending on what you are trying to do with your rig."

Despite her upbringing within the Indian classical idiom, Jain is keen to point out that her own music is not part of that tradition. Although it's an inevitable influence, she draws from elsewhere too, from modular pioneer Suzanne Ciani through to techno artist Donato Dozzy.

"I listen to so many different types of music," she enthuses. "I just start with Indian classical theory because that's what I know, and go off my ear. The aesthetic of it is influenced by the music I discovered when I was living in California."

On the new album, the techno influence becomes apparent on the final track, 'You Are Irresistible', where a thumping kick drum and bass interjections form the undercarriage to her sparkling vocal.

"I listen to a lot of dance music," she says. "A lot of my friends write dance music, a lot of them are incredible producers, and I'm inspired by them. I don't know how to do what they do, but it's a community I'm part of. Sometimes I want to feel reflective, calm and relaxed, and other times I want to be energised… I'd like to explore both and all the emotions in the middle."

More music in that vein may be coming soon, as she is keen to harness some of Brooklyn's hectic energy on her next record.

"I think this initial phase is the most fun part for me," says Jain. "The process changes for me every time a new project begins. I'm trying to find that right now."

'Delight' is out now on Leaving

STAR PUPUL

Rooted somewhere between Yellow Magic Orchestra, Chicago house, Detroit techno and Belgian new beat, the phat grooves and intimate reflections of Ghent producer Bolis Pupul are a joy to behold

WORDS: FAT ROLAND
PICTURE: BIEKE DEPOORTER

For some artists, a debut album is a journey into sound. For Bolis Pupul, his first solo album 'Letter To Yu' meant a 14-hour plane trip, an emotional McDonald's dessert and a stranger asking him to disrobe. And crabs. Let's not forget about the crabs.

It begins in the Belgian port city of Ghent. A teenage Bolis Pupul is on work experience in a recording studio owned by David and Stephen Dewaele. The Dewaele brothers are better known as electronic act Soulwax and, when they're behind the decks, 2manydjs. Stephen has worked with Bolis' father Kamagurka, the legendary cartoonist who created the character of Bert, a middle-aged miserabilist with a human-faced pet dog.

"Stephen produced television, and my dad was a writer and actor," recalls Bolis. "My dad looks like the guy from 'Guest House Paradiso'. What's his name again? Rik Mayall."

While Bolis sets about the colossal task of digitising the duo's record collection, the Dewaeles speculate about signing him to their new Deewee record label. The years roll by, and Bolis finds himself in a pop-punk band with his sister and brother-in-law. The name? Hong Kong Dong – a cheeky nod to his late mother's Chinese heritage. Indeed, his own pseudonym, "Bolis", is a reimagining of Boris in tribute to his grandmother's pronunciation of his name.

"I've always been intrigued by Hong Kong," he says. "But I never really gave it much space. I pushed it away."

In 2022, Bolis releases 'Topical Dancer' with fellow Ghent artist Charlotte Adigéry. The pair are a real Belgian powerhouse, although the album challenges the idea of national identity. Just take the lyrics of 2021 single 'Blenda', which was cheered on by Craig Charles on BBC Radio 6 Music...

"Go back to your country where you belong," mocks Charlotte, before singing, "Siri, can you tell me where I belong?"

Bolis then takes his first-ever trip to Hong Kong, an incredibly lengthy flight to, in his own words, "address something that's been part of my life for a very long time".

Hong Kong tourists may gravitate towards iconic Buddha statues or to its pleasingly spherical space museum, or to Victoria Peak, a nosebleedingly high visitors' centre that overlooks the city. Bolis' travel itinerary is more pedestrian – literally.

He wanders the streets looking for his childhood home and finds himself on Ma Tau Wai Road, a major thoroughfare with heavy traffic, tower blocks with laundry hanging from the windows and high-rise scaffolding wrapped in green tarpaulin. He gravitates towards a McDonald's restaurant, not because he is hungry, but because this building used to be his mother's home. He orders an ice cream, shunning the restaurant's other delights – discounted crayfish broth and a "lucky fortune" chicken burger.

"I sat by the window watching cars passing by on the busy street, and looked up at these very old, colourful buildings where people live without elevators," he recalls. "Not very cosy. A lot of sound and noise. That must have been her view when she was a child."

With these thoughts racing, he stands on a traffic island in the middle of a zebra crossing and jots a letter to his mother, Wei Wun Yu, who had died in a car accident some years before.

"I was so overwhelmed," he remembers. "I thought, 'Damn it, we should have done this together. Why did it take me so long?'. Writing my feelings down made me feel like she was closer to me."

At this moment, an idea is born. The Dewaeles nudge Bolis into a second Hong Kong trip, during which he collects field recordings and phone footage. Much of this ends up on his debut solo album, which bears the title 'Letter To Yu' in tribute to his alfresco writing session. Track titles evoke his journeys – 'Kowloon', 'Causeway Bae' and, of course, 'Ma Tau Wai Road', which he made with his Hong Kong Dong-collaborating sister, Salah.

On the dual-identity single 'Completely Half', you can hear the "doo dit-de doo-dee" sound of his Octopus card being scanned on the Hong Kong subway. The whimsical 'Goodnight Mr Yi' is coloured by the tribal singing of the Dong people of China's Guizhou province. And, in a curious turn of events, 'Doctor Says' features the voice of a man who collared Bolis while he was wandering through Shenzhen.

"This guy asked me if I wanted to come inside and do something with my body. So I laid down on a table and took off my shirt, and he performed a cupping ceremony."

The man was a traditional Chinese medicine practitioner and, in case you were wondering, the ritual involved placing hot jars on bare skin. To promote wellbeing, you understand. While Bolis was being patterned with circular welts, the doctor merrily chatted away. The voice you hear sampled on 'Doctor Says' is him encouraging Bolis to go to bed early and to hydrate because he looked very tired.

And then there's the food. The album was invented in a McDonald's, so it seems logical to have an instrumental called 'Spicy Crab', named after Bolis' favourite street food. The Kraftwerk-inspired track's ascending arpeggios represent the burst of flavours in your mouth, while the melodies stand in for the soft crab meat.

"Then the chilli peppers kick in, like a big bass drum that shakes the whole thing up," says Bolis. "Eating is like a symphony. It has a build-up, a main course, a climax... and then there's an afterglow of how things taste after you've eaten."

Bolis' scattered side projects continue. He's in a long-running band called The Germans, whose new album 'Spirituality' limits its food references to a track called 'Spiritus Asparagus'. But this solo album is important.

His identity is writ large in its quirky, DIY electronic beats. He describes 'Letter To Yu' as "danceable but intimate", and with so many unused tracks on the cutting room floor, it won't be the last time Bolis Pupul will be wandering the streets of Hong Kong, musically and literally. Touring beckons, so another trip to his maternal home may be on the cards, especially as he takes his live show to Australasia.

"Whenever I'm in Hong Kong, I'm going to try to visit that place again," he says. "Burn some incense in a small pagoda in the street. To be able to go there and come away with music? I'm thankful for that."

'Letter To Yu' is out now on Deewee

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AFTER EVERYTHING

PET SHOP BOYS

Nonetheless

X2/PARLOPHONE

Four decades since their debut single ‘West End Girls’, Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe remain playful, magisterial, maddening, divisive, evergreen, droll Britpop originals.

To their detractors, Pet Shop Boys will always be too arch, too aloof, too wedded to a brittle 1980s disco show tunes aesthetic. But for lasting fans, they remain unique cultural figures, witty social chroniclers and queer sophisto-pop figureheads, forever in dialogue between the commercial mainstream and the arty-party underground. Orchestral and electronic, surreal and sardonic, Morricone and Magritte to a disco beat.

Arriving just ahead of Tennant’s 70th birthday, the 15th Pet Shop Boys album feels like a significant late-career landmark. Returning the duo to their former long-term label home Parlophone after more than a decade of self-released records, ‘Nonetheless’ crowns a rich ongoing third-act resurgence for Tennant and Lowe.

After a trilogy of albums with producer Stuart Price, ‘Nonetheless’ also marks the pair’s first full-length collaboration with James Ford of Depeche Mode, Arctic Monkeys, Blur and Gorillaz fame.

This may explain why the lean, clubby, electro-heavy sonics of the last decade have given way to broader, lusher, warmer arrangements. Layered vocal harmonies and orchestral strings appear on every track. Voluptuous in sound and symphonic in feel, the mood here is more Gilbert And Sullivan than Gilbert & George.

Richly emotional and defiantly upbeat in politically gloomy times, the PSB album that ‘Nonetheless’ most closely resembles is 1993’s ‘Very’. The ravishing romantic reveries characteristic of that earlier collection are certainly an abundant motif here. Emerging from a creamy swirl of strings, the opening track and lead single ‘Loneliness’ is a trumpet fanfare blast of brightly hued hi-NRG optimism. It belies the mischievously ironic title with an emphatically positive motivational message about shaking off self-pity and grabbing life by the trousers. The lavish serenade ‘Feel’, meanwhile, with its woozy falsetto refrain, “You make me feel like nobody else can”, is a serotonin rush of pure electropop rapture.

Giddy and glorious, ‘Why Am I Dancing?’ also invokes the galloping euphoria of classic ‘Very’ tracks like ‘Go West’ or ‘I Wouldn’t Normally Do This Kind Of Thing’. A paean to the guilt-free pleasure of solitary partying, the song evolved from one of the duo’s work-in-progress side projects, a stage musical called ‘Naked’, loosely based on ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’. Which would be an easy punchline for PSB-haters if the tune itself was not so elegantly, opulently dressed.

Tennant and Lowe recently covered David Bowie’s ‘All The Young Dudes’ for a BBC radio session, inevitably angering some conservative rock fans. Admittedly, it was not one of their finest remakes, but there is something of the same spirit in the stately orchestral ballad ‘A New Bohemia’, Tennant’s bittersweet hymn to yesterday’s fading stars and the eternal hunt for the latest glittering scene. This is a mighty Beatles-style number, summoning up the kind of misty-eyed Swinging London nostalgia that Oasis might envy.

Bowie also gets an explicit namecheck in ‘New London Boy’, a dreamy pop-rap throwback to Tennant’s coming-of-age arrival in early 1970s London, flame-haired and sexually confused, “hanging around with my glam rock brothers”. The title is a winking nod to Bowie’s ‘The London Boys’ too, while the line “Are they girls or boys?” tips its hat to ‘Hallo Spaceboy’, the PSB’s 1996 remix collaboration with Major Tom himself. Tennant describes this song as “what happens between verses two and three of ‘Being Boring’.” But while the setting is the 1970s, the sound is emphatically 80s, including a boxy spoken-word rap in ‘West End Girls’ mode.

Tennant and Lowe can sometimes seem stuck in an eternal synthpop ‘Groundhog Day’ loop, but ‘Nonetheless’ pushes the stylistic envelope more than some other PSB albums. The most ambitious detour here is ‘The Secret Of Happiness’, an exquisitely retro exercise in Bacharach-infused tropical jazz-pop.

Wafting along on jaunty brass, breezy strings, shimmering harps and nimble Latin percussion, this aromatic cocktail-hour confection sounds like the lost theme tune to a chic 1960s romcom starring Audrey Hepburn and Peter Sellers. Pure pastel-shaded pleasure.

‘Nonetheless’ is packed with shiny earworm bangers, but does have its weaker moments. ‘Dancing Star’, a choppy synth-funk tribute to Rudolf Nureyev, feels a little clunky and literal-minded, while ‘The Schlager Hit Parade’, a lightweight piss-take of gaudy good-time German pop, is more bludgeoning satire than rapier wit. Even so, quality levels are generally high here, covering a broad musical and emotional spectrum.

The underlying feelgood mood is infectious too, only crashing during the closing track, ‘Love Is The Law’, an anguished rumination on sexual desire as tragic compulsion and financial transaction. Drenched in Fassbinder-ish psychodrama, this sombre finale fades out on a celestial choir and waves of reverb. A sustained blast of sun-drenched romantic bliss ending in a doomy rainstorm, ‘Nonetheless’ is one of the strongest PSB works in decades.

STEPHEN DALTON

petshopboys *nonetheless*

SHABAZZ PALACES

Exotic Birds Of Prey

SUB POP

The latest release from the prolific, enigmatic hip hop outfit led by Seattle-born Ishmael Butler is billed as a mini-album, but 'Exotic Birds Of Prey' is dazzlingly maximalist in scope and impact. Butler's cosmic, Afrofuturist vision is as vibrant as ever across these seven tracks, featuring collaborators including Purple Tape Nate and Japreme Magnetic. The highlights though are Shabazz's standalone work on the otherworldly 'Synth Dirt', and 'Take Me To Your Leader', featuring Lavarr The Starr, a Detroit electro-flavoured gem that recalls Underground Resistance and Shifted Phases. **CF**

DALI DE SAINT PAUL & MAXWELL STERLING

Penumbra

ACCIDENTAL MEETINGS

It's an inspired pairing – Bristol's Dali De Saint Paul has previously collaborated with the likes of Moor Mother and Valentina Magaletti, while Manchester multidisciplinary whizz Maxwell Sterling is an acclaimed composer, producer and musician. 'Penumbra' opens with '1' under a cloud of foggy static, with the deep-throated drone of Sterling's double bass soon joined by De Saint Paul's strident, layered voice. Darkly psychedelic, indomitable yet vulnerable, the album courses through Carnatic and ritualistic vocalisations, minimal electronics and rich, bowed bass strings. **FH**

MIKE PARKER

Dispatches

FIELD

The deep, dark minimalist techno of Mike Parker's hugely influential 'Dispatches' (just ask Richie Hawtin or Daniel Avery) is shot through with throbbing, strobe-lit heft and serious intent. It paved the way for so much second-generation US underground dance music following its initial connoisseurs-in-the-know release in 2001. Reissued here on vinyl for the first time, there's a timelessness to tracks like the tense, hypnotically immersive 'Triceratops' or the wildly addictive 'Reduction' that sounds even more compelling 23 years on. Genuine dancefloor perfection. **CG**

THOMAS BANGALTER

Daaaaaalí!

ED BANGER

The Daft Punk man has dabbled in cinematic work before, most notably on the duo's soundtrack to 'Tron: Legacy' from 2010. This release though, which accompanies a "real fake biopic" about the Surrealist artist Dalí, is an undoubted curio that consists of just two tracks. 'Âge Réel' features a clockwork-sounding synth accompanied by gently plucked zither, while the title track retains the same synth figure, except the zither is now picking out a more recognisable melody. Suitably surreal, then. And perhaps one mainly for the collectors. **WS**

THE KVB
Tremors
INVADA

Though often billed as a coldwave act, there's so much category-transcending emotive depth to The KVB's sound. Married duo Nicholas Wood and Kat Day are back with their eighth studio album, dubbed by the band themselves as "dystopian pop". There's a darker, goth-tinged edge to the drum machines and dry ice-shrouded sequencing, which peaks with the hook-laden dynamics of the title track and the blistering standout 'Labyrinths', leading into a vast cavern of driving sonic glory. Superb. **CG**

THE TWELVE HOUR FOUNDATION
Compendium
DISQUES BOUM

Boing! Plonk! Jez Butler and Polly Hulse create such authentically melodic tributes to the 1970s BBC Radiophonic Workshop that you'd be forgiven for thinking they'd used a twangy ruler to summon the spirit of John Baker himself. This two-disc CD set assembles their 2018 album 'Tree Little Milk Egg Book And Other Non Sequiturs', 2020 follow-up 'Six Twenty Negative' and a glut of EPs into one joyous whole. If you aren't listening to 'Macaroni Cheese' with an ear-splitting, face-aching grin, hand in your Spangles and report for double detention on Tuesday. **BF**

SABASABA
Unknown City
MAPLE DEATH

Unfamiliar places can quickly become unsettling, and should you ever wish to intensify the sensation, SabaSaba are more than happy to soundtrack the journey. Italian duo Andrea Marini (synths, guitar, electronics and tapes) and Gabriele Maggiorotto (drums, percussion and effects) home in on all manner of disquieting atmospheres inspired by China Miéville's crime novel, 'The City And The City'. If you're in any doubt as to the haunting effect of their output, one listen to 'False Speech' will convince you of their mastery. **JS**

KASPER BJØRKE
Puzzles
HFN MUSIC

House, disco, electropop, indie, classical, ambient – the world risks running out of genre descriptors to sum up all the music Kasper Bjørke creates. We now need to add lounge jazz and yacht rock, as the Danish polymath's latest album sees him slide effortlessly into the smoother side of the 1980s, accompanied by guests including saxophonist Oilly Wallace and Icelandic trio Systur (also Sísý Ey), whose vocals make 'Conversations' and 'Corridor Of Dreams' sound like a Nordic Fleetwood Mac, while Balearic instrumentals like 'Le Trois' are a warm musical hygge. **PC**

HJIROK
HJirok
ALTIN VILLAGE & MINE

HJirok is the combined forces of Iranian-born Kurdish singer Hani Mojtahedy and Mouse On Mars' Andi Toma. It is also a fictional character, an entity built from field recordings collected on the pair's travels and then manipulated in the studio. On this self-titled debut, Sufi music meets electronica in a remarkable hinterland of the imagination, where beats converge with mystical atmospheres and mythical tales sung in an assortment of tongues. 'Hjirok Rock' exemplifies the uniqueness of the soundscapes, while 'Tehran' builds upon the bones of a minimalist percussive base. **JA**

PEEL
Acid Star
INNOVATIVE LEISURE

Foster The People's Sean Cimino and Isom Innis spin off from their day job to conjure a summery slab of lysergic future-pop on their debut as Peel. The LA duo's sound has something of the carefree euphoria of early Tame Impala (see the opening track 'Y2J'), and elements of Animal Collective's technicolour subversiveness too. Psychedelic electronics underpin much of the album, but come right to the fore on the acid-flecked 'Mall Goth' and 'OMG', both soaring quests for melodic nu-psych gold. Recommended. **CG**

A LILY
Saru I-Qamar
PHANTOM LIMB

The Maltese phrase "saru i-qamar" translates as "they became the moon", referencing people who have passed away. The saying anchors James Vella's latest A Lily album, which uses archival reel-to-reel audio postcards sent from Maltese emigres to their relatives on the island. Their disembodied, unspooling voices float above sensitive, fluttering electronics on key tracks 'Kemm Nixtieq Li Qed', 'Flimkien Ngħaddu Mill-Bieb' and 'Nitolbu Lil Dawk Li Lejlu', creating the feeling of ghostly nostalgia. A moving addition to the diverse A Lily catalogue. **MS**

NIA ARCHIVES
Silence Is Loud
HIJINXX / ISLAND

At just 24 years old, Yorkshire-born Dehaney Nia Lishahn Hunt is too young to remember the 1990s heyday of drum 'n' bass. Hers is a breezy, pop-oriented take on the genre that nods to the past but is unencumbered by it. 'Nightmares' is Spice Girls-meets-early 90s raves, and you can't help grinning at 'Forbidden Feelingz' with its chipmunk vocals. All but three of the 13 tracks here clock in at under three-minutes, making this an assured debut that's bright, light on its feet and most importantly, good fun. **WS**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
L SERIES #6
RUSSIAN LIBRARY

"Just past the house there was a patch where the crows don't go." So begins this intriguing mini-album. Justin Hopper lends his deadpan narration to a spooky MR James tale, accompanied by the rustic stylings of label boss João Paulo Daniel in his guise as Folclore Impressionista. The overall theme? "The spectrality of the garden." So hiding behind the hydrangea is Frances "The Hardy Tree" Castle, adding wistful woodwind to 'Lily Of The Valley', while 'A Sea Education' is rustling electronica from Jörg "Fogroom" Follert. A shadowy summer's evening of a collection. **BF**

SISSI RADA
Aporia
STROOM

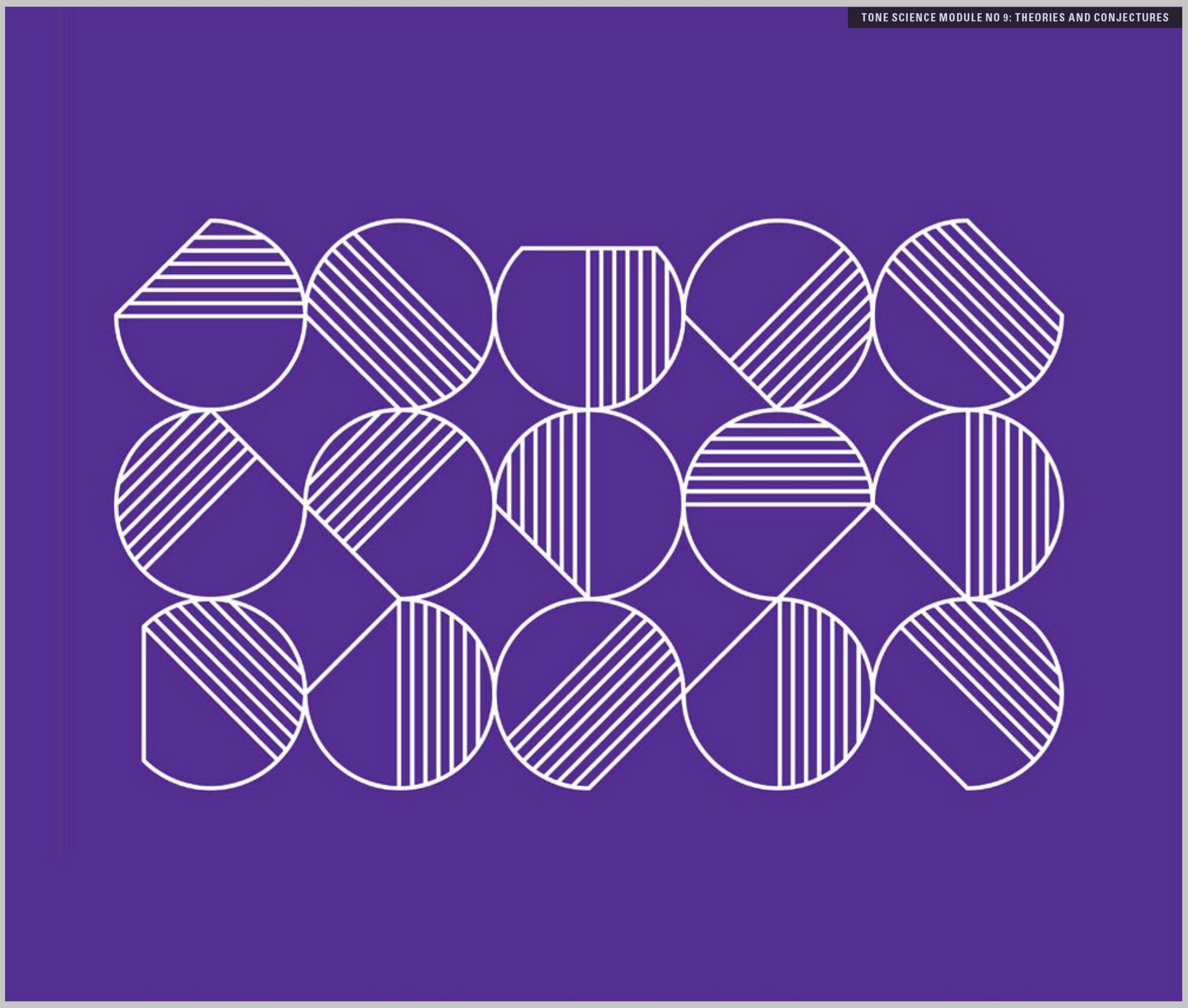
With just her angelic voice, a harp and a Prophet synthesiser, Greek singer-songwriter Sissi Rada creates a soft collection of songs that chart a multitude of moods. 'Epitelous' evolves like a muted predawn, the harp notes of 'Sappho' capture the sparkle of afternoon light on seawater, and the gentle kick beat that powers 'Little Party' adds a balmy sunset glow (you can see why Rada elects to thank "some specific Greek islands" in the album credits). Fans of Mary Lattimore and Lena Platonos will find much to enjoy here. **CF**

GUESTS
I Wish I Was Special
WORLD OF ECHO

Guests are Glasgow duo Matthew Walkerdine and Jessica Higgins. Their particular brand of electronic music is balanced between periodic whimsy, dislocated field recordings and, on 'Chalky Outline', an eerie, sparse atmosphere reminiscent of Throbbing Gristle at their most psychologically unsettling. On the track 'Arrangements, As In Making Them', Higgins forms lyrics from other people's pauses – "Er, well, um, I…" – over a simple beat and muffled synth tones, while the edgy 'Talking About Talking' eavesdrops on someone's still-forming hopes and dreams. Accessible, wonky and unquestionably special. **MS**

NAAFI
UVA
BANDCAMP

A bright new sound is emanating from Glasgow. Naafi has previously co-written tracks for fellow Scottish producer TAAHLIAH, and this debut release makes bounding, hopeful ambient techno that's fun and kinetic, conjuring low-lit cityscapes. 'Hopping' is all chopped, gurgling vocal samples floating above the melody, with a sense of spontaneity and analogue improvisation popping round every contour, while the title track showcases a more club-ready mood full of warmth and crackle. Short, sweet, and an exciting sign of things to come. **TI**



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Tone Science Module No 9: Theories And Conjectures

DiN

Anyone looking to experience the range of textures and moods that can be conjured up with modular synths should make sure they get their hands on the latest collection curated by DiN boss Ian Boddy. From Loula Yorke's entwining sequencer patterns ('Eala') to Alex Ball's minimalist staccato bleeps ('Adaption'), there's a breadth of expression that contrasts with a consistent and dazzling tug on emotions. Round nine in this captivating series, and it shows absolutely no sign of flagging. **AT**

THE NIGHT MONITOR

Horror Of The Hexham Heads

LIBRARY OF THE OCCULT

In 1976, the BBC news programme 'Nationwide' covered the story of the Hexham Heads, a brace of stone carvings unearthed from a Northumberland garden by two tank-topped brothers. Neil Scrivin retells this curious tale with typical Radiophonic relish. So the sinister synths of 'Bedroom Intruder' are the half-man, half-sheep creature that terrorised the boys' neighbours, while the alarming ambience of 'The Doctor And The Werewolf' is a homage to Dr Anne Ross, the specialist in Celtic carvings who investigated the case and was pursued by… well, you guessed it. She's alright nooooow. **BF**

FRAN & FLORA

Precious Collection

HIDDEN NOTES

The second album by avant-garde folk duo Francesca Ter-Berg (cello/vocals) and Flora Curzon (violin/vocals) was inspired by klezmer and Yiddish music. Using electronics for textures and loops, 'Romanian Fantasies II' and the sparse 'Yikhes – Lineage (Doina IV)' have a scratchy, raw edge where moody melodies linger long after the pieces have ended. Vocal tracks take up most of the album, with 'Fishelekh Gefinen – To Catch A Fish' especially attention-grabbing when it moves from rigidity to unexpected wildness. **MS**

CLARAGUILAR

Figura

LAPSUS

Catalan composer Clara Aguilar is quite the polymath, with sound design artist and music producer for theatre, performance and cinema among her credits. The eclectic array of sounds on 'Figura' displays similarly diverse tastes. Her trademark love of an arpeggio remains at the heart of these seven tracks, whether it's the Bukem-esque jungle of 'Ros Elavy', 'Mirada Interior' with its classic Tangerine Dream-style vibrations, or the reflective, exquisite closer 'Mise En Abyme', which is not unlike listening to Vangelis covering Global Communication. **BW**

CLAIRE ROUSAY

Sentiment

THRILL JOCKEY

On Claire Rousay's latest album, the track '4pm' begins with a monologue of melancholic details matter-of-factly uttered before something resembling a slide projector rattles in. Throughout 'Sentiment', the Los Angeles musician builds this tone into a full suite of songs, with bittersweet guitar and disarming found sounds beneath autotuned vocals. The result is emotionally astounding. On 'Sycamore Skylight', distant piano and street noise evoke life viewed through a window, with the urge to find external joys overruled by the depressive impulse keeping you behind the glass. **ST**

HOWLROUND

A Loop Where Time Becomes (Rare & Unreleased Recordings 2012-2017)

CASTLES IN SPACE

There's a strange purity here. No digital effects. No artificial reverb. Just field recordings manipulated, bent out of shape and broken, all invoking new sonic worlds. As Howlround, Robin The Fog makes strange, echoey, Moebius-inspired loops of sound, from the desolate alien howl of 'Fountains VIP' to the tremulous soundscape of 'An Error For Olga', confirming that limitations drive innovation. Each one of these vestiges of the real world resounds with a heady mixture of yearning and horror. Once heard, they'll remain with you for years. **AT**

CHAMPAGNE DUB

Rainbow

ON THE CORNER

Another wicked side project from the prolific Betamax (The Comet Is Coming, Soccer96), this "ancient-future meditation" from his Champagne Dub ensemble is an engaging journey through improvised cosmic dub, psych and free-jazz that fair blows your socks off. From the tripped-out, woozy groove of 'Cumulonimbus' to the "voodoo disco" maelstrom of 'Scrubbing' and the far-out FX of the closing title track – like a heavily sedated Add N To (X) – it's a disorientating but toothsome confection that fully holds you under its dazzling spell. **VI**

KOICHI SHIMIZU

Imprint

SMALLTOWN SUPERSOUND/LE JAZZ-NON

Best known as the longtime musical collaborator of Thai film director Apichatpong Weerasethakul, here Koichi Shimizu consigns some of his most celebrated soundtrack work to vinyl for the first time. The tracks are very varied – the pure-as-raindrops 'Evenfall' is followed by the gnarly electronics of 'Moth' and 'Imprint', the latter like listening to a giant approaching in an electrical storm. The near imperceptible thrum of 'The Path' gives way to 'Cogwheels', which wouldn't be out of place at the climax of an Alec Empire DJ set. It's both terrifying and beautiful by turns. **BW**

ALLIE X
The Girl With No Face
TWIN / AWAL

Canadian producer Allie X might be working in a crowded field but the opening salvo on her third album – the catchy 'Weird World', the title track and the Yazoo-like 'Off With Her Tits' – are as good as electropop gets in 2024. Sleek, modern and soulful, what keeps it really interesting are the cheeky self-conscious nods to 1980s classics, like the synth line from 'Maniac' on 'You Slept On Me' and the drum pattern from 'Blue Monday' on 'Black Eye', as well as X's own awe-inspiring soprano. **WS**

OPEN YELLOW CIRCLE
New Meridian
OPTIMO MUSIC

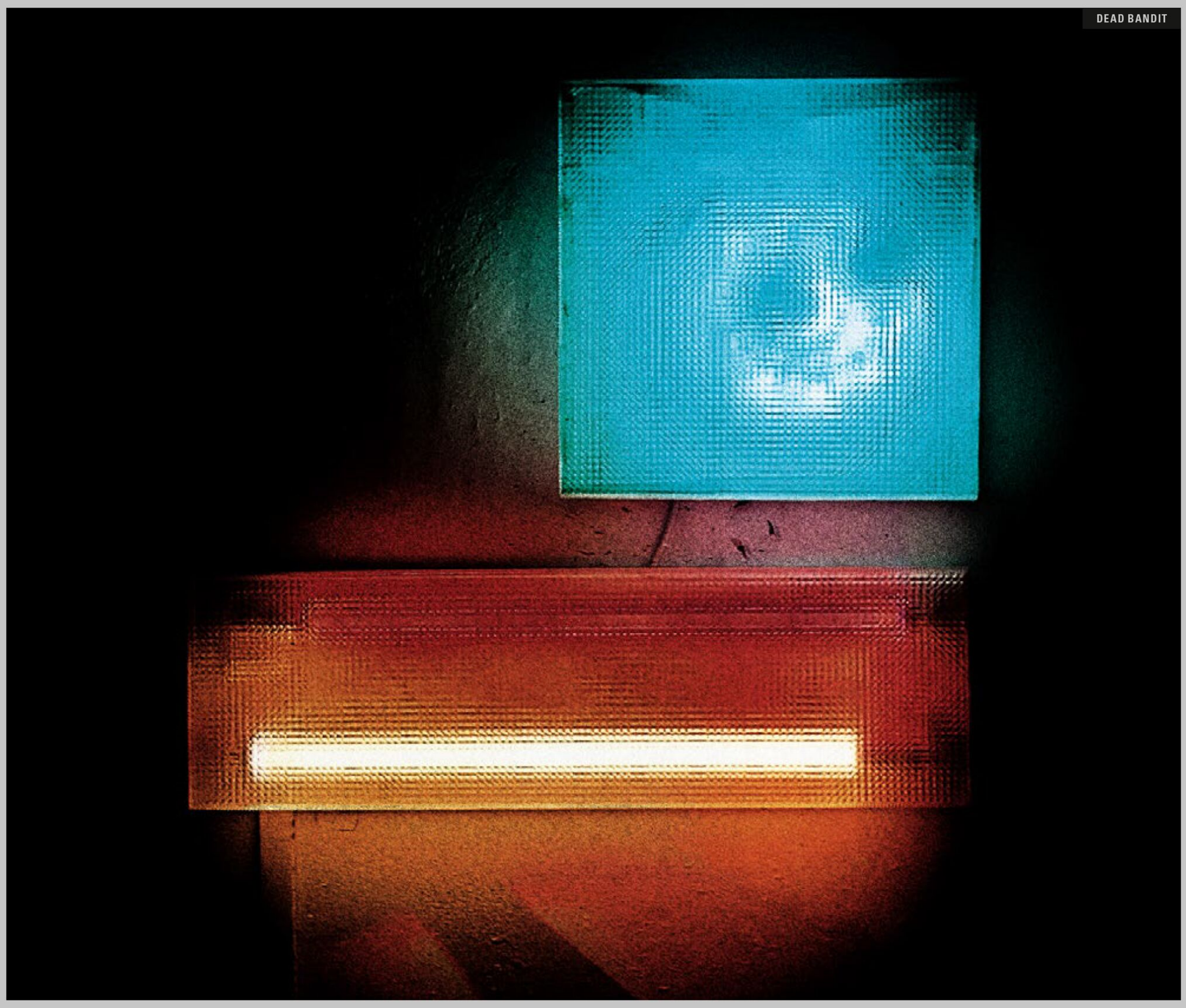
Open Yellow Circle is an offshoot of O Yuki Conjugate, featuring some of the members from the mid-90s version of the group. Unsurprisingly, 'New Meridian' is both similar to and different from the mothership. The filmic, edgy, fourth world ambience is reassuringly present and correct on tracks like 'Cold Stars', as is the eclectic variety of instrumentation, from classic analogue gear to wine glasses, greaseproof paper and "the weather". The distinction is in the album's more defined sense of structure (tighter, even concise) and increased use of melody. Mysterious, otherworldly excellence. **DE**

PEDRO VIAN
Earth, Our Planet?
MODERN OBSCURE MUSIC

The sleeve of 'Earth, Our Planet?' features a figue standing in front of the Great Sphinx of Giza, a trick of perspective locking them eye to eye. Designed to be "a call for environmental awareness", Spanish producer Pedro Vian eschews the expected fiery bombast, with tracks such as 'Uróboros' and 'The Limit Of Nothing', deploying slowly shifting electronics to portray our current ecological doom. Ultimately, these unsettling, low-key soundscapes move slowly apart, just like the erosion of that famous Egyptian construction. **ST**

IVAN THE TOLERABLE TRIO
Infinite Peace
STOLEN BODY

In May 2023, this unassuming trio decamped to Leeds' ATA Studio with one mission – to create freeform psychedelic jazz in the spirit of Alice Coltrane or Sun Ra. After 10 hours, they emerged with this immersive, improvised double album. From the sparse limbering of 'Hymnal', Ben Hopkinson's mellifluous sax leads the way, while Oli Heffernan's liquid guitars and Neil Turpin's organic drums effortlessly fill the gaps. There are raga drones, *actual* Mellotrons, and 'Hipnosis' is their riotous 10-minute take on a vintage Archie Shepp riff. Nice. **BF**



DEAD BANDIT
Memory Thirteen
QUINDI

Chicago's Ellis Swan and Canada's James Schimpl follow up their 2021 debut album 'From The Basement' with 13 alluring tracks that take post-rock as a starting point before spiralling out into more idiosyncratic realms. The pair draw on the dark, distorted sound of Tortoise and Explosions In The Sky, but freshen things up with weathered drum machines and tape loops. So heavily textured, guitar-driven pieces like 'Blackbird' seep into more folky, sun mote-speckled compositions ('Circus'), while the dusty, dubby highlight 'Wabansia' could be a long-lost Darkside cut. **CF**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Noise Of Cologne 3
A-MUSIK

Compiled by Frank Dommert of A-Musik and Dirk Specht of Therapeutische Hörgruppe, this third volume in the 'Noise Of Cologne' series is the weirdest, noisiest and best yet. Comprising 73 tracks – all around one minute long – each varying wildly in tone. 7000 Eichen's 'Small Talk' stutters and coughs, a bit like the Heimlich manoeuvre being administered to jazz, while Titanoboa's 'Aniyo' sounds like the ghost of a German elevator. They're all different, but all are beautifully formed. Fingers crossed for a fourth volume – it'd be worth every second of the wait. **ST**

CROQUET CLUB
Fugue In Twilight
REFLECTIONS

If the trance revival is an actual thing, then Jeremy Villecourt's debut Croquet Club album would seem to be fortuitously timed. Except that, in the 11 years since his first Anjunadeep singles like 'Awake/Cardigan', the French producer has given up club-ready rushes for a combination of Café Del Mar-style chill-out and AOR. Topped with his own earnest vocals, moments like the title track sound more suitable for the sort of parties where a "cheeky half" means sharing the last After Eight mint. **PC**

STRANGE BOY
Love Remains
GROENLAND

The debut album from London duo Strange Boy begins in cinematic scope, with Matt Huxley's spacey synths gradually making way for Kieran Brunt's sad-boy falsetto, like Morrissey singing on a James Murphy production. Brunt's voice becomes the focus as the album progresses, with the lyrics favouring hyper-specificity – "When I was depressed / It made me really good at bowling," he quips on 'Follow The News'. These are crystalline songs, well-formed but at times a little too tasteful, so when the dissonant title track arrives, it's a welcome change of pace. **TI**

CREATION REBEL

High Above Harlesden (1978-2023)

ON-U SOUND

Creation Rebel, the original On-U Sound house band, initially formed in the 1970s as a vehicle for Adrian Sherwood's first album production. The group then became Prince Far I's live band and a prolific studio act. This boxset revisits that first album, 'Dub From Creation', and collects it with four other albums from the late 70s and early 80s, along with last year's 'Hostile Environment'.

The instrumental thrills of that Dennis Bovell-engineered debut are hard to beat for pure dub fans, with Sherwood firing off echoes over heavy basslines and woozy, slow-motion grooves. The subsequent four albums mainly reflect their new "proper band" status, boasting more of a balance between sweet, vocal reggae sounds ('Natty Conscience Free' and 'Mother Don't Cry', featuring John Lydon on harmonies) and more dub-slanted moves, with 'Rebel Vibrations' the heaviest and most dubbed of the set. 'Hostile Environment' sees an update of the sonic aesthetics, but at heart they're still very much the same band, with the likes of 'Jubilee Clock' and 'Stonebridge Warrior' marrying Jamaican and British vibes seamlessly. Give thanks for Creation. **BW**

CARS FROM THE FUTURE

Cars From The Future 2

IRREGULAR PATTERNS

Without a TARDIS to confirm their theories, Cars From The Future are once again here to warn us that tomorrow likely holds space-age, missile-shaped automobiles with the in-car stereo playing something that sounds like Autechre dipped in 'Bitches Brew'. Perplexing as that vision may be, the second collection of jazz-infused beats from Andrew Spackman and saxophonist Richard Davies manages to strike a fairly cohesive balance.

'On Another Night This Would Be Stranger To Us' might be the best example of this – it's vibey, with the saxophones driven well below the speed limit. 'Let Sleeping Dogs Tell Fibs' also shows a certain amount of tasteful restraint, while 'All The Relevant Sources' powers down to quite an enjoyable idle. Elsewhere, many of the remaining tracks sound as if someone imprisoned Thom Yorke in a tiny room with Albert Ayler, refusing to give either one the key until they generated some explosive new music. A wild ride. **JS**

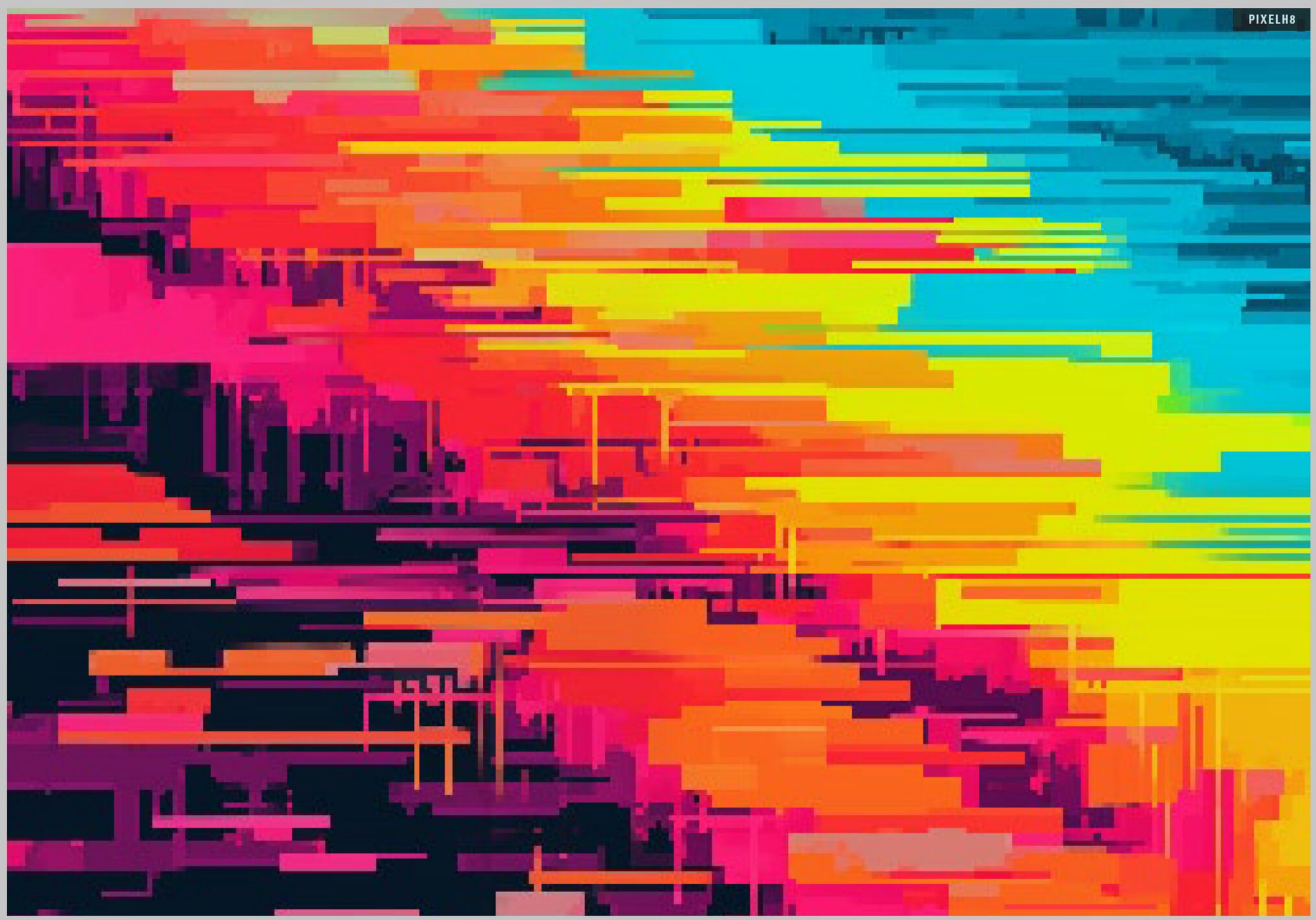
VARIOUS ARTISTS

Lost Paradise: Blissed Out Breakbeat Hardcore 1991-94

BLANK MIND

If not quite as much of a joke as "ambient gabba", the notion of "blissed out breakbeat hardcore" might still seem something of an oxymoron. This compilation shows there was a more thoughtful side to hardcore beyond hoover noises and helium vocals though. As with Richard Sen's 2023 'Dream The Dream' collection of UK techno from the same era, here curators Sam Purcell and Tammo Hesselink aren't trying to retrospectively coin a subgenre as such, rather they're presenting a Venn diagram of tracks that balance up its energy and head-in-the-clouds atmosphere.

So Xray Xperiments' 'Techcore' – which has a piano so old-school acid house you can practically smell the Vicks vaporub – nestles comfortably alongside the likes of The Invisible Man's 'The Flute Tune', a clear precursor to the intelligent drum 'n' bass LTJ Bukem refined on the 'Logical Progression' series. Whether you were raving in the early 90s or not, every track here will get you either gurning or grinning – just don't get it confused with "happy" hardcore, right? **PC**



PIXELH8

Hard Reset

HIDDEN YOUTH

On ‘Hard Reset’, Pixelh8 (musician and academic Matthew Applegate) journeys to the heart of chiptune, “delving into the inner workings” of everything from a ZX Spectrum to a Nintendo Game Boy. Physically, that conflation sounds like something between ‘Tron’ and that bit in ‘Short Circuit 2’ when Johnny 5 circuit-bends himself into a punk. The album, however, is much better than that. The sleeve notes describe the project as “a celebration of both the timeless charm of chiptune music and the enduring legacy of these iconic computing platforms”, both of which ring true here.

‘Disco Diskette Party Check System Check’ is a funky Speak & Spell banger which judders into the analogue bounce of ‘Rainbow Black Rainbow’. However, beyond the genre’s 8-bit sound and obsolete tech, there’s something inherently triumphant built into chiptune’s dusty circuitry, the essence of a million noble quests and final bosses. Applegate captures this perfectly, with ‘The Old Grey Missile Test’ and ‘Plot Armour’ being particularly evocative if, like me, you vividly remember your first computer (Amstrad CPC 464), but your first car, not so much. **ST**

THESE IMMORTAL SOULS

Get Lost (Don’t Lie!) / I’m Never Gonna Die Again / Extra

MUTE

A perennially sensitive soul, Rowland S Howard didn’t easily let go of perceived slights. Having been ousted by both The Birthday Party and then again by Crime And The City Solution, the Australian singer-songwriter and guitarist formed These Immortal Souls with his long-time girlfriend Genevieve McGuckin, brother Harry and drummer Kevin Godfrey (aka Epic Soundtracks). If Howard needed an outlet for his ire, he certainly found a place for it in These Immortal Souls’ two studio albums, 1987’s ‘Get Lost (Don’t Lie!)’ and 1992’s ‘I’m Never Gonna Die Again’.

These grossly underrated post-punk records are now reissued together by Mute, and highlights abound, from the tumbling, coruscating ‘Marry Me (Lie! Lie!)’, to Howard’s peerlessly discordant guitar on ‘I Ate The Knife’. A collection of newly unearthed rarities, ‘Extra’, completes the package, with a sneering cover of Alice Cooper’s ‘Luney Tune’ and a rollicking live version of ‘Some Velvet Morning’, a song Howard had previously recorded in a duet with Lydia Lunch. As McGuckin puts it, “We’re struck by what a strange band we were. There was no one like These Immortal Souls”. **CF**

BULLION

Affection

GHOSTLY INTERNATIONAL

Nathan Jenkins is a popular man. The London producer’s credits range from mainstream to DIY indie, having previously worked with the likes of Ben Howard, Nilüfer Yanya and Avalon Emerson. On his own releases as Bullion, he doesn’t aim to provide an unvarnished self-portrait, so much as simply continuing to hone his eccentric avant-pop songwriting. His 2020 album ‘We Had A Good Time’ showcased his knack for soft, hooky electropop, while in 2019, his curation of the ‘4 Down’ covers compilation shone a light on his love for pure pop classics.

On ‘Affection’, he embodies characters and uses collaborators to tell tales of tenderness and intimacy, but what stands out most is his assuredness in creating a consistent sound. Carly Rae Jepsen, Panda Bear and Charlotte Adigéry are all distinctive voices, but Jenkins expertly weaves them into the fabric here – the lush 80s sound of ‘Rare’, in particular, suits Jepsen’s vocals perfectly. These songs are pliable and pillowy, the production warm and familiar (‘World_Train’, especially, emits more than a hint of Talking Heads’ ‘Life During Wartime’). It doesn’t get much smoother than this. **TI**

SLOWFOAM
Transcorporeal Portal
SOMEWHERE PRESS

The name may evoke leisurely progress, but Slowfoam (Berlin composer, DJ, and performer Madelyn Byrd) is in a creative purple patch right now, turning in one excellent release after another with all the apparent ease of ocean tides. For their recent album 'Worlding With Earth' on Slovakian label Mappa, Byrd expertly fuses "contemporary ambient music and ecological sound art with a free-jazz playfulness". 'Transcorporeal Portal' ups the stakes even further with a deeply dreamy and sensual collection of digitally processed organic material.

Aqueous sounds (some of which have been sourced by fellow field recordist Pablo Diserens) gathered from Spain, Greece and Iceland are swirled together with glitchy electronics, creating an enticing, post-future water world. 'Enlightened Smudge On The Machine' joyfully reimagines new age ambient. Rippling flute supplied by Berlin sound artist Diane Barbé and pacifying spoken word vocals jostle with experimental, stuttering sound shards. 'Fragrantly Dusking' coaxes a gentle rhythm from burbling bodies of water, while 'Of Data & Delight' is the euphoric zenith of natural and artificial worlds colliding. Dive in. **CF**

CLARISSA CONNELLY
World Of Work
WARP

Denmark-based Scottish artist Clarissa Connelly's two previous albums were inspired by ancient burial sites, yet seem more like relics from the 1980s back catalogues of Clannad or Kate Bush. Her new album feels much older, however, both in its musical roots in the 60s revival of early folk, and its lyrical concerns. The latter focuses on the quest for self-knowledge, from the moment she breathes "I don't know how I got here" on the opening track, 'Into This, Called Loneliness'.

The production largely shirks overt electronic effects in favour of foregrounding Connelly's voice, piano and acoustic guitar, which heightens the contrast when she brings drums and electric guitar crashing in on 'An Embroidery' and 'SOS Song Of Stone'. There is still an eldritch touch in the way her voice is multitracked into a faerie choir on 'Wee Rosebud' or the leitmotif of pealing bells throughout the album, but 'World Of Work' suggests the real magic and mystery lies within one's own mental landscape, rather than the rugged rocks outside. **PC**

GAGARIN
Komorebi
GEO

The astonishingly prolific career of veteran experimentalist Graham "Dids" Dowdall reads like the very definition of a national avant-garde treasure. Dowdall has been in the thick of it since the late 1970s, with cult post-punk act Ludus, through several years' working with Nico and John Cale, then on to a number of experimental acts including the last 20 years with Pere Ubu, all alongside his solo productions as Gagarin. The title of his latest masterful work, translated from the Japanese phrase for how sunlight is seen and felt through leaves and branches, 'Komorebi' is just as exquisite, nuanced and delicately poised as all that suggests.

Some of his trademark signatures feature, like field-recorded birdsong and patiently built layers of sonic complexity. The principal theme is all about light and shade, and it's best expressed on 'Wonderdusk 1' and 'Wonderdusk 2', both of which levitate with opalescent pastels and quietly euphoric majesty. But there are veiled moments of ambivalence as a counterpoint, particularly on 'PAM 710'. Recorded while Dids was recovering from cancer treatment, it's an album that speaks of much, not least a truly indomitable spirit. **CG**

CÉDRIC PIN & GLEN JOHNSON

The Allegory Of Vanity

SECOND LANGUAGE

Duo forge an electronic tale for the ages

Glen Johnson has been making pale and interesting music from the fringes since the mid-1990s with “ghost rock” group Piano Magic, collaborating with the likes of Vashti Bunyan, John Grant and Low over the years. One of his most frequent associates (and one-time Piano Magic bandmate) is the Cévennes-based musician Cédric Pin.

Together they’ve made off-kilter EBM as the brilliantly named Future Conditional, and some more enigmatic, memento mori-inspired ruminations as Cédric Pin & Glen Johnson, whose extensive debut ‘The Burning Skull’ they released in 2020.

The follow-up, ‘The Allegory Of Vanity’, has been three years in the making and is no less voluminous, uniting the darkwave elements of Future Conditional with their more medievalist proclivities. The resulting album is a cornucopia of bleak and urbanely humorous vignettes, mostly from the pen of Johnson.

With one foot in the internet age and the other in the Middle Ages, the dislocation of modern living is unpicked with ruthless honesty on ‘Soliloquy’, and listeners still existing in post-Covid stasis may well feel seen.‘The Right Is Wrong’, on the other hand, is a thinly veiled political apologue that takes a swipe at the entitled and perhaps feels a touch too obvious.

It’s when they think more divergently that the innate charm of this long-distance partnership properly flourishes. ‘Practical Dreamers’ features the sampled voices of Surrealist masters Man Ray and Max Ernst, and ‘The Sands Of Time Prevail’ is graced by Dead Can Dance’s former member Peter Ulrich, who chips in with some ocarina.

Then there’s ‘Type Grotesque’ (translated into French by Angèle David-Guillou) which concludes with the ominous refrain “Je suis la peste” (“I am the plague”). ‘Nomen Est Omen’, meanwhile, is suitably glowering and doomy. Johnson appears up close and almost a bit too personal, breathing threateningly into your ear as the music evokes a light-starved basement full of sweaty men in combat gear.

If that wasn’t enough, as well as 10 new tracks, there’s an extra disc featuring two 20-minute solo pieces which meander progressively. ‘Impermanence’ by Johnson is on the A-side (as well as the voice of Quentin Crisp) and ‘Resolution’ by Pin is on the flip. Add to that six bonus tracks, including one inspired by Derek Jarman, and you have a wealth of Pin & Johnson to cogitate over until the next macabre adventure.

JEREMY ALLEN

Shop Talk

The KVB’s Nicholas Wood and Kat Day share their record collecting tips

Hello Nick and Kat. Tell us a bit about your favourite record store?
Kat: “We don’t have just one, but here are our top three! First is Big Love Records in Tokyo. It’s tucked away on the first floor of a residential side-street in Harajuku. The owners are passionate about new music and have a great selection of independent imported music. They also have a very cute bar area with a small TV featuring non-mainstream artist music videos.

“Then there’s Peste in Manchester. Owned by the people who run the best venue in Salford – The White Hotel – Peste is more traditionally a bar but also hosts arts/DJ events and sells a curated selection of records and books. It’s the kind of place where you can meet like-minded people and listen to more obscure music. They had a great Tudor music night just before Christmas.

“Finally, there’s Rubycon Records in Los Angeles – it’s truly a special place! They stock post-punk, electronic and darkwave underground records and tapes from around the world. Being a visual artist, I also love their wall of CRT TVs featuring analogue glitch video art.”

What’s your favourite way to discover new music?
Nick: “We feel so lucky to be able to travel so much playing our music, and this is often how we discover other new music – either from the event itself, or through exploring the city’s music stores or bars. For example, we heard a DJ playing the Mexican artist Rigopolar at a festival in Mongolia last year and have been listening to a lot of his records since then.”

Have you ever purchased a record based on the cover art alone?
Kat: “We are both guilty of this. Some choices have been better than others! Eight or so years ago, at a festival in Estonia, I was completely drawn to a silver and black record and bought it without even knowing the artist. It was called ‘Midnight Wave’ by Imre Kiss and, luckily, it turned out to be great!”

What’s one special album that you’d love to get your hands on?
Kat: “The Soft Moon’s ‘Zeros’. Our friend Luis sadly passed away earlier this year, and while we originally had this on CD from Rough Trade, we don’t have it on vinyl.”
Nick: “We recently went to a family friend’s house and he had an original pressing of Kaleidoscope’s ‘Faintly Blowing’ album, which I know is pretty sought-after and expensive. I have a repress of this album, but I was still blown away to see an original.”

Finally, can you tell us about your record collection?
Nick: “We have a lot of treasured albums in our collection. A couple of the most important for us are our original pressings of David Bowie’s ‘Hunky Dory’ and Joy Division’s ‘Still’, which were both given to Kat by her dad. Others that are now out of print, like ‘The Minimal Wave Tapes’ compilations, are particularly cherished. We’ve listened to them a lot over the years.”

The KVB’s ‘Tremors’ is out now on Invada

Buried Treasure

FINGERPRINTZ

Beat Noir

VIRGIN, 1981

There wasn't much room on the dancefloor for the version of Fingerprintz that released their 'Distinguishing Marks' LP in 1980. If the Scottish quartet were searching for success, they were doing so in the new wave era, at a time when The Vapors had recently struck gold with 'Turning Japanese'. Not even the early endorsement of Radio 1 Godhead John Peel could be converted into any serious chart action. Then something changed.

"Fingerprintz were on tour with another Scottish band called The Skids," singer Jimme O'Neill explained to YouTuber Stephen Schnee in 2021. "And the drummer of the band had been replaced by a guy who lived in London called Rusty Egan. He'd become involved with Visage and Steve Strange and was saying, 'Alright Jimme, you need to come to my club up in the West End. It's called Blitz'."

After initially being turned away, O'Neill dutifully showed up one night with a more suitable set of clothes and proceeded to have his mind blown all over his sharp suit. The impact of the Blitz experience, coupled with an opening slot on Talking Heads' 'Remain In Light' tour, convinced O'Neill that the band needed to inject horns, synths and a revamped vocal approach into their new material.

From the ecstatic shouts and pounding kick drum that launch the opening track 'The Beat Escape', Fingerprintz immediately served notice that album number three was mined from fresh ore. With a title like 'Beat Noir' their intentions couldn't have been any clearer. The tracks were all taut grooves and uber-hooky choruses. Even the cover image of a young woman who looks as if she's just about to disappear into the night drove the point home.

But maybe the true measure of the record's success is the 40-plus years in the rear-view mirror, looking back on when those of us who were standing inside a New York hotspot like The Ritz or The Peppermint Lounge risked getting trampled when 'Get Civilised' hit the PA.

The new Fingerprintz came off as fun and urbane, but outside of UK clubland and US radio they still weren't having it. As things began to dissolve, O'Neill went off to pursue folk rock with The Silencers and most of the other band members joined Adam Ant for the swan song of his career. For a moment though, 'Beat Noir' was proof that the band pulled off a deft artistic shift for a dancefloor in constant transition. Perhaps it just came a little too late.

JOE SILVA

MICHEL MOERS

As Is

FREAKSVILLE

Synthpop pioneer's overdue second album

Michel Moers is one of the trio who made up Telex, the Belgian electropoppers who gave us a robo-electro version of 'Rock Around The Clock', entered the 1980 Eurovision Song Contest with 'Euro-Vision' (they finished 17th, disappointed not to attain "nul points") and bequeathed us with much else besides.

There's an irony which Moers would doubtless relish in that the group's name refers to a now-obsolete technology. But the reality is that in tandem with Kraftwerk, they helped lay the foundations of a synthpop that was European in origin and consciously antithetical to rock.

This is Moers' second solo album, a rather less than brisk follow-up to his debut, 'Fishing Le Kiss', released in 1991. It has, however, been gestating for several years. His appetite for renewed creativity was galvanised when he and fellow surviving Telex member Dan Lacksman were invited by Mute to remix their back catalogue for a 2021 release.

Each of these 10 tracks feels like an individually cut gem, never settling into a lazy groove, overt familiarity or repetition. 'Les Gens Sont Affligeants' (which translates as 'People Are Disappointing') reflects the essential Telex spirit of arch detachment that was evident in their 1988 track 'I Don't Like Music'. Halting, anxious, atmospheric, it sets the existential tone of the album.

'Microwaves', bubbling and arpeggiating and featuring Propaganda's Claudia Brücken, then follows. "Through my eyes I can reheat…frozen hearts." This is unlikely to rank as one of her best works, but it really should.

Ideas are executed swiftly and economically before moving on, and yet still burst with great detail. So it is with the colouring and idiosyncratic tempo of 'New Friend'. 'Keske Tu Veux?' is full of fresh permutations, while similarly offering flashing reminisces of DAF and Material.

'REMIX' is another fine salad of familiar tropes and unfamiliar variations that alludes to a "remix" of the soul, while the closing track 'Tu T'Endors' is marinated in melancholic bliss, with its woozy, wistful guitar effects. On this composition in particular, you sense Moers has his mind on his much-missed Telex collaborator Marc Moulin, who died in 2008. The final word of the album is "encore". Indeed – more of this, please, and soon.

DAVID STUBBS

BRIAN ENO
Eno
UMR

This soundtrack to Gary Hustwit's documentary of the same name provides a neat reminder of Brian Eno's polymathic brilliance. Here we have Eno the collaborator, partnering with Daniel Lanois, Jon Hopkins, John Cale and others. We also have the ambient pioneer ('Ho Renomo' with Cluster), the left-field pop musician ('Stiff'), the proto-punk ('Third Uncle') and the plaintive choirmaster ('Everything That Happens' with David Byrne), alongside many other incarnations.

Three previously unreleased tracks are included on the soundtrack. 'All I Remember' is a wistful, nostalgic ballad, with Eno emotionally trawling through memories as if gazing sadly at curling old photographs. 'Lighthouse #429' finds him in a fractured jazz-funk mood, like a throwback to his 'Spinner' album with Jah Wobble and Jaki Liebezeit. The album highlight is the fragile, mournful and reverential 2021 recording of 'By This River', performed at the Acropolis with his brother Roger, which is truly among his most moving moments. An essential, though naturally incomplete, survey of Eno's myriad musical strategies. **MS**

RIDE
Interplay
WICHITA

There's an alluring alternate universe where Ride didn't split in 1996 and this is their 17th studio album. But perhaps that two-decade breathing space was necessary for a bit of perspective? 'Interplay', the band's third long-player since their fruitful 2015 resurrection, is a work of very grown-up wistfulness. "The feeling inside / Is a tension that's outside of time," sigh Mark Gardener and Andy Bell in perfect unison on 'Peace Sign'. The song is, apparently, about daredevil free climber Marc-André Leclerc, but it feels like a world-weary metaphor for the daily rock faces we all have to conquer.

Musically, it's an album of charming curveballs, with U2 guitar flourishes and Depeche Mode-style synths throughout. 'Sunrise Chaser' could even be Tears For Fears with Bhundu Boys guitars. And the closing track, 'Yesterday Is Just A Song', feels like Bell looking back on the band's turbulent history with a melancholy half-smile. "Everyone's got troubles of their own / Sometimes it's too much, but I don't stop living." It's a touching conclusion to a delightfully bittersweet collection. **BF**

DIP FRISO
Dip Friso
REAL LANDSCAPE

Dip Friso is Glasgow musician Murray Collier, though if you weren't familiar with his work, the warped guitar and synths, and dusty percussion of this self-titled fifth release might sound more California than Caledonia. Initially, the odd electronics of tracks such as 'I'll Get To Hiding' (featuring Still House Plants vocalist Jessica Hickie-Kallenbach) and 'The Conversation' wobble and bend like sun-parched Sun Araw or the exotic worlds touted by LA's Not Not Fun label.

However, listening a second time – and having revisited the previous, beat-leaning albums like 2022's 'Crocodile Or Real?' released via his own Real Landscape label – Collier's sound does begin to exude Scotland. The fractured textures of 'Another Country' echo and rumble, as much bustling cityscape as windswept glen, while 'Thin Ayrshire' has an irresistibly ramshackle slackness that's like Lone Pigeon covering The Jesus And Mary Chain. What Collier's work captures, and it's the same reason that on first listening these pieces conjure wide desert horizons, is a sense of scale – the bulk and rugged beauty of landscapes evoked via beautifully haunted electronics. **ST**

A CERTAIN RATIO
It All Comes Down To This
MUTE

For their 13th album, A Certain Ratio purposefully stripped themselves back to their core trio of Jez Kerr, Martin Moscrop and Donald Johnson. Honed, precise and impeccable, that nucleus gives 'It All Comes Down To This' a spare, minimalistic sound that harks back to their Manchester post-punk beginnings.

'God Knows' is one of the tightest tracks here, inching very close to pop territory with its glistening synth hook, joyful chorus and clipped, melodic guitar. 'All Comes Down To This' features wild electronics and intense phasing, stitched to characteristically metronomic drumming and a churning bassline. 'Where You Coming From' features classic ACR cowbell percussion, leading to an irrepressibly funky, danceable and uplifting song that ponders life's deepest existential questions. The final track 'Dorothy Says' is the album's high watermark, featuring a rhythm that nods to The Velvet Underground and The Jesus And Mary Chain, its lyrical themes focused on making sense of the increasingly parlous state of the world. Thirteen may be an unlucky number for some, but definitely not for ACR. **MS**

PYE CORNER AUDIO
The Endless Echo
GHOST BOX

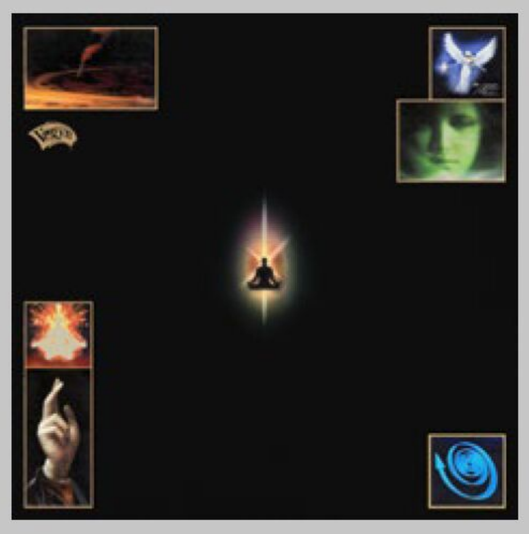
Martin Jenkins, aka Pye Corner Audio (or Head Technician when performing live) has been steadily refining his spectral netherworld techno across a prolific career that began back in 2010. Alongside 11 full-length releases, he's remixed for the likes of John Foxx, Mogwai and Ride's Andy Bell, and produced scores for landmark TV and film productions including Adam Curtis' seminal 2016 feature documentary 'Hypernormalisation'.

Jenkins always seems to save his best work for Ghost Box, on faultless albums like 2012's stupefying 'Sleep Games' and 2016's 'Stasis'. This, his fifth album for the label, is no exception. It sees him riff on science fiction notions about the nature of time, and especially the idea that it may be entirely unreal. Shorter and distinctly cinematic dark-ambient sketches like the half-speed, dystopian 'Lacunae' or the broodingly atmospheric 'Heat Haze' frame longer sequences that shift spectacularly in mood and pace. The sublime 'Chronos' is a standout, launching into a cavernous, crystalline sonic cathedral, before hitting an irresistible Giorgio Moroder-meets-John Carpenter haunted dancefloor groove that knocks you sideways. **CG**

ARUSHI JAIN
Delight
LEAVING

This self-styled "modular princess" has staked out her own sweet spot where Indian classical idioms meet with cosmic synthesised sounds. Jain's debut album, 2021's 'Under The Lilac Sky', was made to be listened to in the hour before twilight, where the pastel colours mingle in the heavens and everything feels a little bit magical and tingly. Her follow up, 'Delight', is a more inward journey, making for an intimate record drawn from the musician and singer's personal experiences, though as the name implies, it is always of a cheery disposition.

These are universal healing soundwaves, perfect for meditation and contemplation. There are several styles of song that cohere under the all-inclusive umbrella of echo and delay. 'Still Dreaming' drifts on the same root note, guided by otherworldly drones, spacey textures and ascending/descending vocal scales, while both 'Imagine An Orchestra' and 'Exquisite Portraiture' are more baroque in their musical ambitions, with notes cascading like celestial dew. **JA**



VEGYN

The Road To Hell Is Paved With Good Intentions

PLZ MAKE IT RUINS

Moving songs tackle gamut of emotions

Joseph Thornalley (aka Vegyn) is a tricky one to pin down. One minute he's crafting beats for pop royalty like Frank Ocean or remixing Olly Alexander, and the next, the London producer is releasing ambient mix tapes or collaborating with the poet Francis Hornsby Clark (as Headache), for the surreal simulation of a nervous breakdown that was last year's album, 'The Head Hurts But The Heart Knows The Truth'.

His sound is just as difficult to get to grips with. A swirl of electronics drawing in both vaporwave synths and the downtempo trap beats of cloud rap artists such as Clams Casino, with an equally nebulous emotional register floating between comforting and crestfallen.

Thornalley's second "proper" Vegyn LP, following 2019's 'Only Diamonds Cut Diamonds', gives us something more solid. Sure, with its drowsy melodies and generally hypnagogic air, 'The Road To Hell Is Paved With Good Intentions' shares more than just a really long title with his cassettes like 'Don't Follow Me Because I'm Lost Too!!'. Whereas those comprised 70 or so miniscule instrumentals, here Thornalley extends his ideas into actual songs, notable for the fact that – unlike with previous vocal collaborators such as JPEGMAFIA – you can hear what the guests are actually singing about.

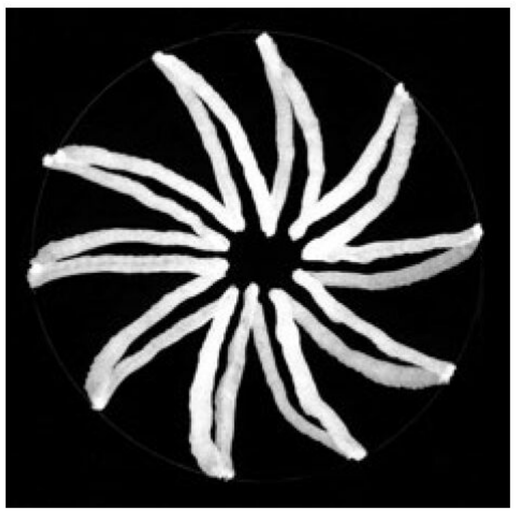
It's emotional stuff. Ethan P Flynn ruminates that it's "Only a short time / Before I get wise" over a featherweight UK garage beat and rueful keys on 'Another 9 Days'. 'Turn Me Inside' is mood-lit soul featuring Léa Sen, while 'Halo Flip' is the definition of a "sad banger", as Lauren Auder's lovelorn voice swells over a rollicking breakbeat before sinking amid symphonic strings.

The instrumentals are also largely exercises in melody and feeling rather than experiments in rhythm and sound. The summery house of 'Makeshift Tourniquet' has its eyes set on festival stages. The guitars, whispered samples and glitchy rhythms of 'Stress Test' and 'Last Night I Dreamt I Was Alone' lean towards the sort of emo-influenced electronica of Loraine James' 'Gentle Confrontation' or Claire Rousay's 'Sentiment'. 'The Road To Hell Is Paved With Good Intentions' feels similarly intimate and introspective.

'In The Front', featuring Hackney rapper John Glacier, ends with a sample of a voice saying, "Laughing's a lot like crying / But what's the space in between?". Well, whatever it is, that's where Vegyn truly fits in.

PAUL CLARKE

Label Profile



Label: Somewhere Press
Location: Glasgow / London
Est: 2022

Potted History: "We met as listeners of each other's radio shows and found a synergy in the emotive intensity that guides our selections," say co-founders Lizzie Urquhart and Tim Dalzell. "Now we DJ together, and our mixes inform the direction of the label – we see them as an evolving research collaboration. We often take time to compile shows – the process is very important to understanding the atmosphere we want to create.

"We formed under the name Somewhere Between Tapes and our first few releases were made by ordering cassette tapes in small runs and using any income to fund the next ones. It's since expanded and we'll be releasing several albums on record this year – thanks to Boomkat for the support. Bandcamp has been such a vital ecosystem for experimental music, and we wouldn't exist without the community there – we're so grateful to those who bought our early tapes and made things possible."

Mission Statement: "We started the label out of a desire to amplify voices that still feel underrepresented in experimental music and work primarily with women and queer artists. Having both studied visual arts, we're drawn to musicians who explore sound as part of an expanded practice, on the borders between experimental music, sound art and performance.

"We make the artwork for our releases, and there's a strong underlying concept to each one but made in a very DIY way. Many evenings have been spent cycling between each other's flats, constructing abstract still lives in our sitting rooms. We did a shoot on the east coast of Scotland recently on a snow-covered beach under moonlight. Everything's shot on 35mm film. The medium has an element of fortuity to it that illustrates the type of music we're drawn to – extemporary, emotive and woven with obscured narrative."

Key Artists & Releases: "Everything we've released is key to the label and it's important to us to build community around what we do. We've programmed events with many of the artists and always look to curate shows that will allow these crossovers.

"We're delighted that Alliyah Enyo and Man Rei will both release albums with us again this year. If Somewhere Press is new to you, check out our various artists compilation 'The Blue Hour'."

Future Plans: "As well as the releases mentioned, we have a few tapes planned with new artists. We see cassettes as an essential medium for experimentation and plan to continue to release them even as we expand into other formats."

Any Other Business? "We have made so many beautiful connections since beginning this project. We encourage more women and queer folk to start labels, so please reach out for advice if you're starting out."

For more, visit somewherepress.bandcamp.com

First And Last And Always

Yosa Peit on the first and last albums she bought, and a go-to record

FIRST

THE SOURCE FEAT CANDI STATON

You Got The Love

1997, ZYX MUSIC

"My first maxi-CD with a bunch of track versions. I lived through extreme teenage countryside boredom and heard the Now Voyager version on BFBS Forces Radio, an English post-war station that shook up the German radio landscape. It was originally recorded for a 1980s documentary. Candi Staton luckily received half the rights, as the filmmakers had no funds for a session fee. The vocal has been taken on many rides since. Check out the Frankie Knuckles version."

LAST

ASTRID SONNE

Great Doubt

2024, ESCHO

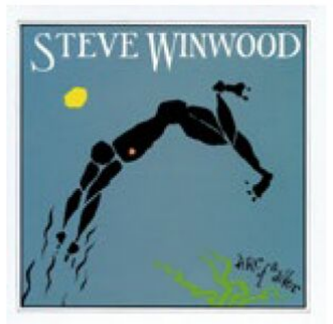
"This is the last album I bought for a series of mixes in the run-up to my new release. Astrid Sonne drew me straight into her production. Her vocals are so direct, her arrangements stripped back, and the instrumentation that's sometimes dubby is also tender and slim. I really like when music moves you just through very little elements. 'Boost' is probably my favourite track. Its organ strength throws you around gently in the waves."

ALWAYS

STEVE WINWOOD

Arc Of A Diver

1980, ISLAND



"My dad listened to this album with me tirelessly in the car. I throw on the scratched tape when I really need something feelgood or from my childhood. The 80s cheese is almost too much, yet it's got a strangeness – like 'Spanish Dancer' with its sparse, cool melody. Winwood, self-recording and playing all the instruments, mixing LinnDrums with real drums and synths with keys, inspired me to work in a similar way."

YOSA PEIT

Gut Buster

FIRE

Moreish second outing from Berlin producer

A broadsheet reviewer writing about an early Pixies gig once remarked that it didn't matter if you didn't like one of their songs, as another one would be along pretty quickly anyway. That's very much the case with Yosa Peit's second album 'Gut Buster'. A remarkably lean and streamlined listen (given its big-bellied title, at least), only four of the 15 tracks make it past the four-minute mark.

That said, like some weird unknown element it's impossible to lift a mere handful of, the Berlin producer doesn't seem to need any longer than a few minutes to create a sound that's implausibly dense and heavyweight. From the constellation of revolving guitar notes and raw, vocals that open the album ('Twixx'), this is a masterclass in creating moods that descend suddenly and envelop you completely in potent, swirling mists.

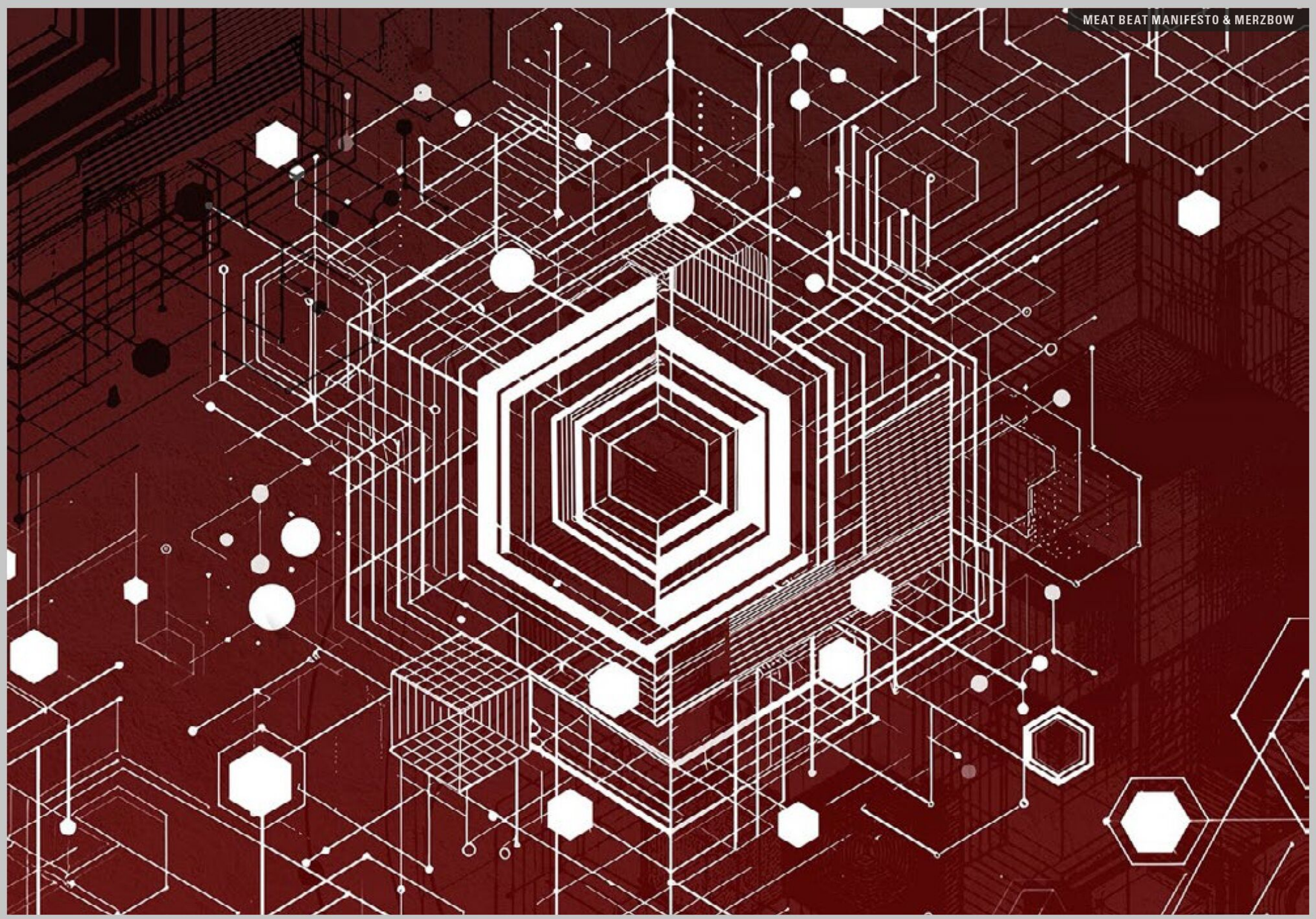
Attempting to sum up this album means spewing forth a host of different names in an attempt to capture its magic, from Björk and Arthur Russell to A$AP Rocky, and Prince who's certainly a good comparison for Peit's intimate, soulful singing. But in terms of atmosphere, there's something in common with those ancient blues recordings of Robert Johnson, Leadbelly and others, where the emotion is as expansive as the backing is sparse, and the spaces between the notes scream louder than any instrument.

'Gut Buster' covers the whole spectrum. 'Bb Moon' is playful, notes running up and down the scale, its bass guitar looping forwards and backwards. 'Shelly' is full of tension and portent, a keyboard line moving restlessly over ponderous single bass and flicked funk guitar notes, while an impossibly stretched voice inhabits the ultra-high frequencies.

'Call Me', meanwhile, is the kind of candid vocal track that wouldn't be out of place on Leila's 1998 cult classic album 'Like Weather' – gnarly at the edges but sweetly soulful at its core. 'World Eaters' resonates with righteous anger and Sabbath-style riffs, while 'Look Around' feels innocent and pure.

'Gut Is God (Gate Of Discord)' consists of a swaying sea of voices in exultant rapture held together by the merest bass foundations. It's a spectacular end to a highly dramatic album that genuinely sounds unlike anything you've ever heard before.

BEN WILLMOTT



MEAT BEAT MANIFESTO & MERZBOW

Extinct

COLD SPRING

A collaboration between Meat Beat Manifesto and Merzbow is not so beyond the realms of possibility that the Earth threatens to tip off its axis at the very thought. And yet, you do wonder how Swindon's Jack Dangers (aka Meat Beat Manifesto), an undersung influence on big beat and industrial, and Tokyo's Merzbow, the undisputed doyen of Japanese noise, came to be in each other's orbits. That said, the latter has ploughed a lonely furrow of sonic excess but he's also been a frequent fellow traveller, teaming up with the likes of Boris, Xiu Xiu and Richard Pinhas of Heldon.

As you might have guessed, 'Extinct' is trial by ordeal with cathartic benefits, in much the same way as dental scaling is. Side A's 20-minute '¡FLAKKA!' commences with a distorted beat that degrades as the track hurtles along, being fed back into itself to create an endless degenerative loop. 'Burner' offers something similar, but heightened to a punishing degree. Merzbow on his own often facilitates feelings of calm hidden in pockets among the noise, though there's a sense with 'Extinct' that this pairing offers more of a doubling up of extremes. **JA**

JANE WEAVER

Love In Constant Spectacle

FIRE

A unique and adventurous songwriter, Jane Weaver's music has evolved subtly since she became a solo artist in the late 1990s after stints in Kill Laura and Misty Dixon. The follow-up to 2021's celebrated 'Flock' finds her working with a producer for the first time in her solo career, ruminating fluidly on life and death, and using word randomisers to contribute to her lyric-writing process.

That's not to suggest that this is some sort of Burroughs-like cut-up affair, though the key song 'Perfect Storm' does lean into psychedelic synthpop with aquatic arpeggios that he would have no doubt appreciated. Across the 10 tracks here, Weaver flits freely between brittle torch songs, sharp electronics and Laurel Canyon-inflected rock. 'Univers' and 'Family Of The Sun' are sparse and Nico-esque, while 'Romantic Worlds' has a sweeping, impassioned euphoria. 'Motif' is the album's devastating highlight. Built from acoustic guitar and the most spindly of synth melodies, the track is graceful and accepting, and had me in floods of tears at its notion of time slipping away uncontrollably. **MS**

GUDRUN GUT

GUT Soundtrack

MOABIT MUSIK

'GUT' is a new TV show in which Gudrun Gut takes on new challenges, from making sourdough bread to taking a boat trip at moonlight, with former Orb/Sun Electric techno icon Thomas Fehlmann. Even the creation of the 24 pieces that act as the show's soundtrack becomes the subject of one of the episodes. With a 40-year career behind her in groups such as Einstürzende Neubauten, Mania D, Malaria! and Matador, the move into soundtrack works comes naturally.

'Gut Intro' begins with an endearing, almost intentionally clumsy motif before unexpectedly reaching a violent meltdown. 'Weisses Blatt' follows, combining meditational spoken word with squelchy synth expressions, then the fantastic 'Gutscore' goes for bubbling arpeggios and Reich-like tinkling, guitar and woodwind joining in as it gradually builds to emotional heights. There's always a sense of drama at play, from 'Fish Sequenz', which pits a funky sequencer groove against outbreaks of white noise, to 'Nostalgie (Akkordeon)', opening like a Bavarian folk tune before descending into crazy echoes and wonky effects. If the TV show is anywhere near as funny and fresh as its score, it's sure to be a hit. **BW**

DANA GAVANSKI

Late Slap

FULL TIME HOBBY

Dana Gavanski's 'Late Slap' is a bold examination of modernity and all the discomfort we're likely to encounter with the spoils of so-called progress. "Tired of your zombie glow / Soaking up your eyes," sings the Serbian-Canadian songwriter on 'How To Feel Uncomfortable', a song that captures the strange liminal disconnect that ensues when technology proliferates in our lives. It's an outstanding opening track, a new wave-style banger for the ages and an anthem of disaffection, with Gavanski's trilling soprano at times emulating the quirky emotionality of Lene Lovich.

To make this, her third album, Gavanski first learned the ropes with Pro Tools, and then took her band off to Margate to see Tunng's Mike Lindsay, who provided production and layers of Yamaha DX7 to subdue any acoustic sheen. That synthesiser adds a contemporary dimension to tracks like 'Singular Coincidence' and 'Song For Rachel'. Gavanski might feel estranged from modern life, but 'Late Slap' will prove comfort to anyone who feels the same way. **JA**

RETEP FOLO & DOROTHY MOSKOWITZ

The Afterlife

BURIED TREASURE

She was the voice of 1960s psychedelic pioneers The United States Of America. He is the Swedish synth maestro with a penchant for offbeat time signatures. And when they got together, it was… actually, rather wonderful. This virtual collaboration sees Moskowitz adding cautionary narration and floating harmonies to Peter Olof Fransson's ecologically minded soundscapes. "Dare, dare to breathe the air before the air runs out," she intones solemnly, amid the baleful guitars of 'Running Time'. "No turning back before time runs out."

The high point comes with the five-part 'The Black Hill Suite', a seamless 13-minute montage. Moskowitz weaves Latin chants and the wide-eyed musings of her five-year-old grandson Boom into Fransson's modular shards, before Svante Sjöstedt's chiming guitars lead us into the melodic uplands of 'Sleeping Hills'. And then with the concluding title track, "There'll be suns exploding here and away / And then all blackness and bleak, withdrawing into an abyss," whispers Moskowitz, lending warmth and humanity to the infinite hereafter. **BF**

FUJI||||||||||TA

MMM

HALLOW GROUND

Ambient music can be one of the most rewarding genres to sink into, but it can be difficult to achieve the state of pure focus that's required to take the plunge right into its depths. Japanese musician 'FUJI||||||||||TA' (Yosuke Fujita) gets around this obstacle through the use of a hand-made organ, which emits such an immovable architecture of noise that surrendering to it is as easy as submitting to an expert hypnotist.

'MMM' follows Fujita's lauded 2020 album 'Iki', also released on Hallow Ground, and sees the addition of an electronic air pump to his pipe organ, granting greater control of his massive sound. From the offset, the 20-minute-plus 'M-1' is an immense composition of unbroken drone, its many piped voices meshed together in complexity, the resonant highs and thunderous lows expelling the listener's thoughts like leaves scattered by a strong wind. 'M-2' features looped acapella vocals, before the organ joins for the finale,'M-3', with all the strands of the album woven together, creating an almost holy-sounding triptych. **FH**

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Rusty Egan Presents The Blitz Club

DEMON

Definitive cuts from a switched-on selector

When Visage's Steve Strange and Rusty Egan took over the Blitz club in London in early 1979, little did they know just how much their 18-month stint would shape their own lives and those of the extravagantly attired devotees – the Blitz Kids – who frequented the fabled nightspot.

Stylistically, culturally and musically, the epochal Blitz had a seismic impact far beyond its intimate confines. With Strange as host and doorman, enforcing a famously strict dress code (flamboyance was very much the order of the day), it was the epicentre of the game-changing new romantic movement that would soon proliferate far and wide.

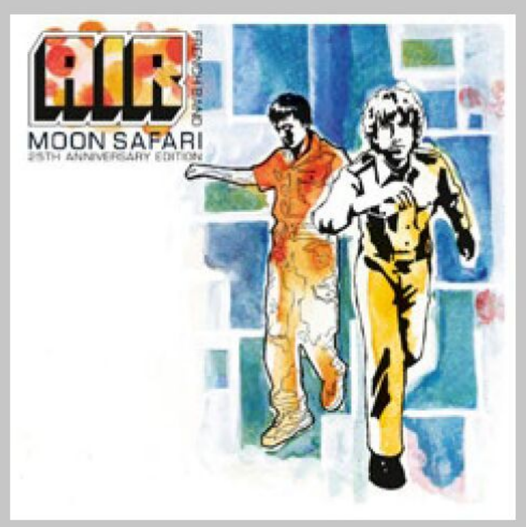
Inside, stationed behind the decks, Egan diligently picked electronic, European, new wave, left-field and glam floorfillers that made the Blitz tick. With a voracious appetite for emerging music, he set the sonic agenda, often travelling to Düsseldorf, Berlin, Paris and beyond to dig out obscure records – sounds of the future that quickly rippled into the mainstream, providing sonic inspiration for countless fledgling early 80s bands to fly.

Curated by Egan, this new definitive four-CD/four-LP boxset offers a wealth of slinky, exquisitely paced gems that reflect his extraordinary Blitz playlist. One heck of a rush it is too – plugged in and fully immersed, it's not much of a push to imagine yourself in the heat of the action, lost to the eclectic thrill of it all as early, experimental synthpop (The Human League, The Normal) rubs up against European cutting-edge (Kraftwerk, Gina X Performance, Telex), industrial vibes (Throbbing Gristle, Cabaret Voltaire), disco (Cerrone, Hot Chocolate) and post-punk (The Cure, The Slits).

Unexpected cuts are slipped in – Jeff Wayne's apocalyptic 'The Eve Of The War' and jazz drummer Billy Cobham's esoteric, atmospheric 'Spanish Moss', as well as the lesser-known 'Mannequin' by French new wave act Taxi-Girl and 'Touch' by short-lived Liverpool synthpopsters Lori & The Chameleons – all of which are testament to Egan's digging skills. Inevitably, Visage's 'Fade To Grey', perhaps the first true new romantic single – breathy, sexy, eminently danceable – is also included. Everything just *works*. And Lou Reed's 'Perfect Day' is such a great closing track, apt yet strangely poignant. Total sensory overload – what a buzz.

Ever the completist, Egan has put together an exhaustive 250-track Spotify playlist, including pretty much everything he played at Blitz. All told, a deeply joyous and essential snapshot of a defining era from a peerless selector. Fill your boots.

VELIMIR ILIC



AIR

Moon Safari (25th Anniversary Edition)

RHINO

Jubilee reissue of a French classic

As French revolutions go, this one was deceptively unassuming, initially. Emerging from the mid-1990s nascent French Touch Paris club scene – alongside Daft Punk, Bob Sinclar and Étienne De Crécy – Nicolas Godin and Jean-Benoît Dunckel stood apart from their contemporaries. These Versailles students (of architecture and mathematics respectively) wielded an array of antique analogue equipment, exuded effortless Gallic je ne sais quoi, and had, well, something of a way with a vocoder.

'Moon Safari' is still a dazzling, genre-splicing brew that's simultaneously sleek and sultry. It's the aural equivalent of 'Plein Soleil'-era Alain Delon reclining in an Eero Aarnio Ball Chair. Its strength in 1998 was that it played retro-futurism straight. In creating a sound that was neither ironic hipster indulgence nor po-faced Stereolab-esque missive, Air unlocked a new audience, sold millions and – it has to be said – inspired many insipid imitators in their wake.

It was a moment, but what a moment. From the seven-minute groovy opening track 'La Femme D'Argent', to 'You Make It Easy', 'Ce Matin-Là' and the essential 'Sexy Boy', the sashaying analogue vocodery of 'Moon Safari' is still as finger-clicking good as when it first emerged, fully-formed, in 1998.

This new deluxe CD reissue comprises the original album, a collection of rarities, and a Blu-ray containing a Dolby Atmos mix of the album, the gorgeous violins-and-strings bath that is David Whitaker's version of 'Remember', plus the documentary 'Eating, Sleeping, Waiting And Playing', filmed during Air's first world tour.

There are some great rarities. 'Dirty Hiroshima (Demo)', with its characteristic vocoder, wah-wah keyboards and analogue wooshes, is easily the equal of the best of 'Moon Safari'.

Meanwhile, the bubbling, quietly insistent 'New Star In The Sky (Demo)' simultaneously contrasts and complements the spacey, contemplative original. And then there's the live cover of Funkadelic's 'Maggot Brain', which is just as breathtaking and unimaginable as it sounds, with the iconic guitar solo switched to synths and Rhodes piano.

The duo's other albums (particularly 'The Virgin Suicides' soundtrack) are arguably of equal quality to 'Moon Safari', but no other Air record was quite as beautifully carefree.

ANTHONY THORNTON

REVIEWS BY
JEREMY ALLEN,
PAUL CLARKE,
STEPHEN DALTON,
DAVID ELLIOT,
BOB FISCHER,
CLAIRE FRANCIS,
CARL GRIFFIN,
FREDDIE HUDSON,
VELIMIR ILIC,
TONY INGLIS,
JOE SILVA,
WILL SIMPSON,
MAT SMITH,
DAVID STUBBS,
ANTHONY THORNTON,
SPENSER TOMSON,
BEN WILLMOTT

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

Cédric Pin and **Glen Johnson** take on this month's quick-fire questions

INTERVIEW: CLAIRE FRANCIS
PICTURE: PHOENIX PIN

Hello Glen, hello Cédric! Where are you right now and what can you see?
Glen: "I'm at the Hotel Paradiso in Paris. The rooms convert to your own private cinema, so I can see a blank projection screen flanked by red velvet 'Twin Peaks' curtains."
Cédric: "I'm in my home studio in southern France, sitting at the desk facing dark grey minimalist acoustic panels with a touch of electric orange at the top left corner, and I've suddenly thought of the artist, Robert Morris."

You're former members of Piano Magic, the "Anglo-French, ghost-rock band". Did you ever imagine that you'd later collaborate and make music like your latest album 'The Allegory Of Vanity'?
G: "Yes, it was entirely conceivable! We have always been two trains on the same track."
C: "Back then, maybe not, as we were busy with Piano Magic and too preoccupied with the present to think about the future. But still, at one point during that time, I could feel I would probably continue doing music with Glen, no matter the circumstances of life, especially when we began recording as Future Conditional. Today, with regard to our hooked atoms and our respective aspirations, this seems obvious."

Memento mori is a recurring theme in your work. What's the fascination with that?
G: "For me, the obsession with social media has been the fuel. People seem to live more on their phones than 'in reality', often blinkered to what's going on right in front of them. Memento mori translates to 'remember you must die', but that's obviously not a pressing concern for the smartphone generation."
C: "To paraphrase Francis Bacon, throughout our lives, we go arm in arm with death. There has never been a day when I didn't think about it. In this sense, memento mori always appeared to me as a rich subject, a food for thought offering endless resources that artists have always been nourished by, whether in painting or in music – the two artistic fields that interest me the most."

'The Allegory Of Vanity' is inspired by a painting of the same name by the Spanish baroque artist Antonio De Pereda. What drew you to that painting?
G: "It's a vanitas still life – the perfect evocation of material wealth that equates to nothing when your time is up. And yet, we still spend our lives accumulating as much junk as possible, which will inevitably end up in a skip or charity shop."

Derek Jarman is referenced in your track 'The Clinic'. What was the inspiration?
G: "I'm a big fan of the man and particularly his writing. I spent lots of time in eye clinics last year, trying to save my sight from a serious infection. I wrote a piece about the waiting rooms, which inadvertently echoed Jarman's descriptions of his own fading eyesight in his film, 'Blue'."

We're in awe of the complexity and depth of 'The Allegory Of Vanity'. How did you piece it all together, and decide what to include and what to leave out?
G: "We started with the intention of making an EBM album – very much inspired by DAF and Nitzer Ebb in particular, but our love of Cabaret Voltaire, Tools You Can Trust and Foetus started to muscle in. We're single-handedly trying to ignite a resurgence in metal bashing."
C: "It was a long, patient and meticulous process, made with passion. Not much of the material has been left on the side. Glen has a natural talent for compiling things and knows exactly what should and what shouldn't be on the record."

You cite many musical inspirations for the latest album including industrial, Ivo Watts-Russell-era 4AD and Coil as well as 1980s EBM... do you have very similar musical tastes, and are there any points where your tastes diverge?
G: "I don't think there's anything we wouldn't agree on, to be honest. It's sickening."
C: "Yes indeed, we have very similar musical tastes. I've always been impressed that life led us to work together, because I couldn't come across someone I have so many musical references in common with. It's just incredible, really!"

'The Sands Of Time Prevail' features Dead Can Dance's Peter Ulrich on the ocarina. How was it working with him?
G: "Our second time – he played on a previous Piano Magic album, 'Ovations'. We're deeply respectful of the Dead Can Dance family, and they have always been a huge influence. Peter brings what you'd least expect to the party. In the case of the opening track, it was Adam & The Ants-esque 'ooh-ahs' – which we loved."

You enlisted visual artist Josh Hight to sing on 'Prick'. Do you feel a kinship between his output and your own?
G: "Josh is a good friend and an amazing artist, photographer and creative director in his own right. But mostly we are big fans of his voice, the soft texture of which seems to perfectly complement our, hmm… 'muscle'."

We loved your last album as Future Conditional. Will there be another one from you under that guise?
G: "Probably. We are children of 80s synthpop, so it's never far away. We're very thankful to ES for keeping this music – and so much more – in the public eye and ear!"

These days, you make music together from a distance via France and London. How does that process work?
G: "By the magic of Ableton Live! We constantly swap sessions and WAVs, building on the other's work or deconstructing it."

And will there be another chapter in this memento mori-themed run of albums ?
G: "Undoubtedly. Although, I think we'll be heading in a more sacred music direction next, albeit electronic."

'The Allegory Of Vanity' is out now on Second Language

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